



Government
Publications

N° 26

ISSN 1180-2987

Legislative Assembly of Ontario

Second Session, 41st Parliament

Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

Deuxième session, 41^e législature

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Thursday 3 November 2016

Jeudi 3 novembre 2016



Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Todd Decker

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Greffier
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Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Service du Journal des débats et d'interprétation
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

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Second reading agreed to	1386
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Second reading agreed to	1386
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 3 November 2016

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 3 novembre 2016

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ELECTION STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LES ÉLECTIONS

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 2, 2016, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 45, An Act to amend certain Acts with respect to provincial elections / Projet de loi 45, Loi visant à modifier certaines lois en ce qui concerne les élections provinciales.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Questions and comments? Seeing none, further debate?

Mr. Ted Arnott: I'm pleased to have this opportunity this morning to speak to Bill 45, the Election Statute Law Amendment Act, which was introduced by the Attorney General on October 19 and is now at the second reading debate stage.

It's ironic that we're debating changes to the election laws in Ontario, when, as we know, this place is consumed with the events of this week: the news that the OPP have charged two senior Liberal operatives, one of whom was previously and recently the deputy chief of staff to the Premier, as well as one of the significant Liberal organizers in Sudbury. They've been charged under the Election Act with allegedly offering a bribe to Andrew Olivier, who had previously been the Liberal candidate in a provincial election.

Apparently, the Liberal operatives were trying to get him to stand down as a candidate. He was, in fact, recording the discussions because he's a quadriplegic, and those recordings were released into the public domain as well as to the OPP. After a two-year investigation, we see that charges have been laid.

Yesterday, we learned that there were other implications for the current member for Sudbury who currently sits in the cabinet as the Minister of Energy. His name was included in the police documents that were filed with the court. All of this is very, very troubling, as we know, and it continues to be the focus of discussion in the Legislature as we discuss and debate Bill 45.

However, I want to focus, in the short time that I have, on some of the elements of this bill. We see that the Election Act is being amended or at least there's a proposal to amend the Election Act to allow for sharing of equipment, resources and data, which would allow equipment, advice, staff or other resources to be shared with other electoral authorities in Canada, specifically removing the restriction on sharing vote-counting equipment. Any funds acquired through the sharing of equipment, staff or other resources are paid into the Consolidated Revenue Fund. I doubt that any of the political parties proposed that change. I suspect that came from the Chief Electoral Officer of Ontario, and I think that it's probably in the public interest that we agree to that amendment to the Election Act.

There's also an amendment with respect to vote-counting equipment. I understand that the bill indicates that the Chief Electoral Officer may issue a directive which would require the use of vote-counting equipment during an election. Vote-counting equipment must not be connected to a network during voting hours, but may be connected to a secure network after the polls close for the purpose of sending the results to the Chief Electoral Officer. Of course, this is intended to bring modern technology into the tabulation of our ballots. Again, I think that it is prudent and reasonable that we look at these ways of improving the system of counting the ballots as long as we can ensure that there is integrity in the process.

The equipment must be tested before the first elector uses it and after the last elector has used it; I think that's prudent and reasonable as well. The equipment must not be used in a way that enables the choice of an elector to be made known to an election official or scrutineer. Again, I think that obviously is a recommendation that most likely has come to us from the Chief Electoral Officer, and it would appear to be consistent with some of the other recommendations he has made to modernize the process.

There is a provision with respect to voting information. A candidate or registered party may opt out of receiving copies of polling lists, the permanent register of electors, extracts of or updates to the permanent register of electors, or any other elector information. This, again, is an important issue in my riding. During the election campaigns that I've been privileged to run in as a candidate—I guess seven now—I try to make it a practice not to tell our local returning officer how to do his or her job. I feel, as a candidate, it's not my right or

my obligation or my responsibility to try to run the election as well as be a candidate at the same time. But when there are complaints, many of the complaints do come to our campaign office, and the volunteers who have supported me over the years in many cases will refer those complaints to the local returning officer.

During the course of this debate, we've heard from a number of members that the voting lists appear to have significant problems. When I think back to the very first elections that I was involved in, in the 1980s as a volunteer—as you may know, Madam Speaker, we used to enumerate everybody, every voter, in the ridings across the province. It was a very time-consuming process and somewhat expensive, I'm sure, in comparison to how we do it today, but I'm not 100% sure of that. But it did get us to having local voter lists that were actually quite accurate, and I think it's time to do that again. We need to spend the resources to update the list and get it up to a more accurate state, similar to what it was in the 1980s. I would recommend that during the course of this debate. We really have to do something to improve the accuracy of our voters lists all across the province in every riding.

Voting day for scheduling elections changes from the first Thursday in October to the first Thursday in June. Now, it is popular, I think, in terms of public opinion polling—I would have seen this question tested through public opinion polls. The whole idea of having a fixed term and a fixed election date well in advance seems to be popular, but I would suggest and submit to the House that it is somewhat inconsistent with the whole idea of parliamentary democracy.

We know that within the Legislature here and in the House of Commons and in Westminster in Great Britain, and indeed across the Commonwealth, in parliamentary democratic systems the government is accountable and responsible to the Legislature or to the House of Commons, and, day to day, month to month, year to year it has to govern with the confidence of the House. We, as elected members and legislators—actually, perhaps this is new to some of us, but our greatest power is our decision day to day to express whether or not we have confidence in the government of the day. Backbench government members have an obligation also to consider that and to take steps to hold the government accountable. Again, this is fundamental parliamentary democracy 101, but I think, to some degree, it's been overlooked and, quite frankly, forgotten in a number of respects.

The fact is, fixed-term dates are often not adhered to. Certainly, if the government loses the confidence of the House or the Legislature, an election can be triggered, if the Lieutenant Governor agrees that one is necessary. So this whole idea of fixed-term dates, I think, to some degree, is misleading to the people. In this current Parliament, since the election in 2014, I think the government has publicly stated three different election dates. Do we have confidence that this is now the final word on when the election is going to be? I'm not sure how we would, because just in two and a half years, the government has

told us three different dates as to when the provincial election is going to be. Again, I would submit that that may change. If there is perhaps a leadership change within the government party—there are a number of scenarios, of course. We don't have to look too far back into history to see where this might, in fact, change yet again. I just want to put that on the record because I think it's important.

0910

I also recently received a very interesting letter from the Wellington Federation of Agriculture concerning the representation of agriculture within rural ridings. It was addressed to the Premier by Janet Harrop, who is the president of the Wellington Federation of Agriculture. I just have a couple of minutes left, but I think this is a really important issue in terms of the representation of rural residents and I want to put it on the record as well.

"The Wellington Federation of Agriculture ... is the largest farm organization in the county of Wellington and works in concert with the Ontario Federation of Agriculture.... Both federations work to develop consensus in a diverse agriculture industry and lobby for policies that create a sustainable and profitable environment for farming in Ontario. In fact, WFA represents over 1,300 farm businesses within the county of Wellington.

"Wellington county is an agricultural powerhouse. According to the 2011 census of agriculture, Wellington county farms generate more than \$685 million in farm-gate receipts annually, provide 58,000 weeks of work to the local labour market, and are stewards of over 495,000 acres of land."

It goes on: "After the review and subsequent reduction in the number of provincial ridings in 1999 we have seen more urban density of voters and continued movement of the voter voice from the rural area to the urban centres in Ontario. The census of rural Ontario has seen the number of voters in the rural area decrease as farms become more efficient and consolidate with" fewer "owners/operators and the size of rural families decreasing. The needs of agricultural versus urban businesses differs significantly from a municipal, provincial and federal level and each voice needs to have equal weighting in the country, with the reduction of the number of ridings from 130 to 103 and the number of residents within the riding increasing on average from an approximate" size "of 60,000 to 115,000."

She goes on to say that there's been an exemption in northern Ontario due to geographic size and low density of voters in those large northern ridings. She makes the point that we need to express some degree of consideration for the large geographic size of our rural ridings—which unfortunately has been taken out of the equation.

I see I'm out of time, Madam Speaker, and I appreciate the indulgence you gave me this morning.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: It's always my pleasure to stand up in the House, and to add my voice to Bill 45. It's a really important bill. I know it's 15 recommendations

or suggestions from the chief elections officer of Ontario, but really, this is such an important piece of legislation—and it is a bit of housekeeping that we're going through with it. We're just trying to clean up some of the rules that are applicable when there's an election.

One of the interesting pieces of this—and we've been talking about this quite extensively—is the youth engagement piece in the elections. The actual act here defines how to engage youth voters, and they're going to start having a registry where 16- and 17-year-olds can actually put their names on the registry so that when they turn 18, they are already on there and they can get their slip. It can be a much easier paper process with less paper and less running around looking for your identification to register to vote.

On that note, I want to let everyone know that I have some guests here today, and they are youth. These youth are so engaged in civic politics that they took the time to drive all the way from London, Thorndale and Ilderton to come here and spend the day at the Legislature to learn about politics and to learn what our democracy is all about. So I want to give them a round of applause.

Applause.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Last night, I had a wonderful conversation about legislation, laws in Ontario and the ideology of different political parties with some of the youth, and it really inspired me. It inspired me to feel that—you know what? There is life in the youth and interest in elections. Hopefully, when they leave here, they're going to tell all their friends, and it's going to continue. We need to do that more under this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Gila Martow: I'm very pleased to rise to make some comments on my colleague and the NDP speaker who spoke. I'm a little surprised that there are no questions or comments from the Liberal caucus, since my PC colleague was mentioning that, as we're speaking on Bill 45, the Election Statute Law Amendment Act, it's a peculiar week to be debating this. He has actually said to me personally that he's a little surprised that the government would even want this to be discussed this week in the face of ongoing allegations of bribery in the Sudbury by-election. I have to question why the government didn't put up a speaker. I'm guessing that they're looking down at their desks thinking, "Gee, yeah, I wonder whose decision it was to bring this for discussion today."

We're all concerned about elections. We want elections to be fair. We want as many voters as possible to vote at election time, to feel engaged, to know the issues and not just to tick off the ballot but to really feel that their vote counted in the election. I think that Thornhill went through a rough time in the last election because unofficially they were told that I had possibly lost on election night and then the next day it was overturned when five or six mistakes were caught at different polls. It brings us to also think about who is working on elections at election time and why mistakes were made.

I'm not going to get into whether or not there was an investigation. I'm guessing that there wasn't any deep investigation at the time of the election. But people are raising concerns to me in Thornhill about the next election. They want to know if the people who worked at the polls where mistakes were made—and we are calling them mistakes, Madam Speaker—will be rehired at the next election time.

I'm not able to answer that question, but maybe it's something that should be thought of: that if somebody is not doing their job properly at an election, they should not be considered to be rehired the next time there is an election.

There are a lot of concerns about using electronics at election time, and I'll leave that for another time.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments.

M^{me} France Gélinas: It was interesting to listen to the member from Wellington–Halton Hills. He finished by talking a little bit about the ridings in the north, and this is where I want to pick up on what he has to say. I represent one of those big, large ridings in northern Ontario, the riding of Nickel Belt. There is a First Nation in the riding of Nickel Belt at the federal level called Wahnapiatae First Nation, which, because of an error that was made by somebody in Toronto who thought that nobody lived in the northern part of Nickel Belt, put them in the riding of Timiskaming–Cochrane. It makes no sense, Speaker, to have the people of Wahnapiatae First Nation belong to the riding of Timiskaming–Cochrane. They come to my office; they belong to Nickel Belt. They certainly are a vibrant part of Nickel Belt. But when this government had an opportunity to change the boundaries to put Wahnapiatae First Nation where it belongs, in the riding of Nickel Belt, they voted against it.

They have an opportunity with this bill. Here, again, we are looking at the boundaries of electoral ridings in the north of Ontario. I urge all of my colleagues to do the right thing. Wahnapiatae First Nation, every single chief and band council, has written to this government and asked that this mistake be corrected so that they are able to vote in the riding of Nickel Belt and they are able to feel like they belong to the riding of Nickel Belt. So when it comes time to make amendments, I will be bringing forward an amendment to make sure that the Wahnapiatae First Nation is put back in the riding of Nickel Belt and that this error that was made by somebody in southern Ontario, who did not care to check that there were people living in that part of my riding, is corrected once and for all.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments. I recognize the Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation.

Hon. David Zimmer: Thank you very much, Speaker, for that recognition. My ministry appreciates it, and I appreciate the new name of Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation because the emphasis now is on building relationships with indigenous peoples and, of

course, reconciliation. So I do recognize your recognition of me, albeit slowly.

I want to comment on those provisions of this bill that deal with the spring election date. There are many parts of the bill that will make voting easier, and one of them is moving the scheduled election date to the spring. That's going to allow voters to take advantage of the warmer weather and longer daylight hours and, yes, make for easier campaigning. As the Attorney General said in his leadoff, there are many important advantages to having an election at this time of year: longer days, warmer weather and, most importantly, avoiding confusion with the municipal election season.

0920

There are other benefits as well, and one of these considers the schedules of many people in the rural parts of the province in the late fall. Since the new fixed date would be just after planting season, it's very convenient for Ontarians in hunting and fishing communities to not have voting conflict with their hunting and fishing activities.

There are also some administrative advantages to holding earlier elections. For example, one is that candidates in parties that are filing the required documents with Elections Ontario after the election would be doing so in the same calendar year as the election. That certainly makes some sense, that you would file all your required documents in the same calendar year that the election actually occurred. In the current situation, often these documents have been filed after the election year—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Thank you. I return to the member from Wellington–Halton Hills for a wrap-up.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I want to express my appreciation to the members for London–Fanshawe, Thornhill, Nickel Belt and the Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation. He indicated what the new mandate of the ministry was; I always thought that was his mandate before the change of name.

In any event, I think we should revisit the comments that were made by the member for Nickel Belt. I know that the New Democrats, in the course of this debate, have raised that issue on a number of occasions and did so earlier in the week. While I would suggest that members of the Legislature should not be in the process, normally speaking, of setting their own riding boundaries—the term “gerrymandering” comes to mind; we see that in the United States. It's real problem. We need to respect the independent commissions that set up riding boundaries and allow them to do their work without undue political interference.

I would say that in this case, from the arguments that I've heard from the member for Nickel Belt, there is a real issue in the north and in terms of her riding. I would hope that the government will take a good, hard look at it in a non-partisan way and look for the public interest to find a solution. I would hope that that can happen.

I want to go back again to the concern that we have about the Sudbury by-election. I know that this has

continued to be the course of the focus of the debate in this Legislature and in the media—and in the coming days. Seriously, Madam Speaker, when we see what has apparently happened in Sudbury, we have to think again about the ethics of our electoral process. Surely, the people of Ontario would expect the political parties to be observing the electoral law and to be playing by the rules during an election campaign, so that there's integrity in the process and integrity in the outcome and general acceptance of the outcome.

It's fundamental to democracy that we, as political parties, live by the rules within the Election Act. Obviously, I would again remind the government that this is a very, very serious issue that they're dealing with, and they have to respond appropriately.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I have a little bit of a rough voice today, so I'll try and do the best I can. Before I get into the formal part of my speech, I've got to address two things I've heard this morning.

To my friend with the Liberal Party about election timing, my suggestion would be: Let's have the election now so we can stop the sale of Hydro One. Just a thought.

And then, because I don't want you to think I'm just picking on the Liberals this morning, yes, we've got an issue in Sudbury around the by-election, but I find it interesting this morning that the Conservative Party are hammering you over the election in Sudbury when they never, ever once talked about the Scarborough election—we have a new colleague with us—and the letter that was sent out—

Interjections.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Please, let me finish. I know it's early in the morning. I'd like to get this out, Madam Speaker, because I think it's fair and reasonable to say it.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Okay. You know the rules. The member from Niagara Falls—it's his turn to speak. We need to be respectful.

I'm going to return to the member from Niagara Falls.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I just want to say about the Scarborough election: You can't send a letter out to 13,000 new Canadians in Tamil and in Chinese, say that this is how you feel about sex ed and then come out on Monday and say, “No, I didn't know anything about the letter.” What should have happened—I think it's fair and reasonable to say this in this House. What should have happened instead of—

Interjection.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'm okay? I thought you were going to stand up.

What I thought was fair and reasonable was to say, “Well, if that's how you didn't feel, why didn't you send out that letter to the 13,000 people who were going to vote on that Thursday so they knew exactly what your position was?” I think that's fair. If you're going to go after one, you have to raise the Scarborough issue too. I

thought that was really unfair to our new Canadians on that particular issue.

The interesting thing was, the win was by 13,000 votes. That's a big win. Congratulations. You know how many letters were sent out? Thirteen thousand. That's all I'm saying. I'm not saying anything other than that, but I think you've got to raise both those issues to be fair. I'll start my speech now.

As always, it's a great pleasure to rise in this House to speak about an incredibly important issue for our province; namely, how we conduct our elections. The bill before us today, the Election Statute Law Amendment Act, Bill 45, makes some important and welcome changes to how we conduct elections in the province of Ontario.

Over the last three years, the Chief Electoral Officer in the province has released a number of reports that sought changes to the way we conduct elections. The CEO has taken time to carefully review not only the 2014 general election but also multiple by-elections, and has put out some recommendations that I'm glad to see the government is following today.

The aims of this bill and, I would have to imagine, the aims of the CEO when he was releasing these recommendations are twofold. First, this bill is looking to increase voter turnout and voter participation. Clearly, that's a good thing. Second, the bill is specifically seeking to increase representation of First Nations communities in the north of our province, which is also a good thing.

I think it would surprise no one that I and all my colleagues in the Ontario NDP think those are important goals. We should absolutely be doing everything in our power to drive up turnout and participation in our electoral system. Even more so, we need to put in the effort to make sure that northern First Nations communities are properly represented.

As a member who represents one of the most southern ridings in our province, I'm not going to spend a lot of time today telling the people of the north what they need or what they should be doing. We have some fantastic MPPs from the north in our caucus, and I know they will do a good job of informing us on how the north and the First Nations communities there see this bill.

That being said, I want to draw the House's attention to one of the problems that I think this government has created for itself. You see, today I am standing here and speaking to a bill whose stated goal is to increase representation for First Nations communities and get them more involved in our electoral process. But yesterday, I rose in this House and laid out how the government is failing to properly consult First Nation communities when it comes to aggregate extraction and mining claims. The government introduced a very broad piece of legislation to address these issues in that sector, but failed miserably when it came to addressing one of the central issues.

The Liberal government still does not see fit to legislate a duty to consult with the First Nations people of our province, and I think that's a mistake by all of us.

How can the government stand with a straight face on Thursday and call for increased representation for First Nations communities when they stood on Wednesday and told the First Nations people of our province that there is no duty for us to consult with them when it comes to resource extraction? I think that's fair and I think that's valid. It's a little ridiculous, what happened there.

Does this government truly believe that by simply playing more ads in First Nations communities they're going to overcome the decades-long oppression that has led to the current levels of participation in our political system among First Nations people? I certainly hope not.

We need to finally legislate a duty to consult the First Nations people when it comes to resource extraction, but also when it comes to any issue that affects them, their land or their livelihoods. I'll repeat that: their lands, their livelihood. That and only that will change the current dynamic and encourage the First Nations people of this province to participate in our electoral system.

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There are some other provisions of this bill that I do look at as being a step in the right direction. One of the things I've tried to do since getting the honour of being elected to represent the people of Niagara Falls, Fort Erie, Niagara-on-the-Lake and everything in between is to do everything in my power to get young people involved in politics. That's why it's so nice to see all these young people here listening to the debate this morning. And this is interesting: All my staff is under 30; my campaign teams had a full group of young people. I was so proud when my youngest daughter voted for the first time last year. I won't tell you who she voted for because it's a secret ballot.

Interjection.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Now, now.

I try my best to engage as many young people in the political process as I possibly can. Why is that? As anyone who knows me knows, I didn't have a lot of opportunity growing up. My family didn't have a lot of money, so I went and worked in a factory at a real young age. Through the factory, I was able to get involved in my union, and through my union, I got involved in politics, but it sure did take a long time. I want to make sure that everyone who doesn't have an opportunity to get into politics is given that opportunity. It's so important. That is why I was very pleased to see that Bill 45 takes some good steps in the right direction when it comes to increasing youth participation in our electoral process.

Let me start with the obvious one. Bill 45 will ensure that the CEO will create a volunteer registration of eligible 16- and 17-year-olds. Those 16- and 17-year-olds will then be automatically transferred to a permanent register of electors once they reach the voting age. I think that's great. I'm incredibly happy to see them taking this step to encourage young people to start to learn and be involved in our process even before they are able to vote. I think that's important.

There are some other provisions in the bill that I think will also help encourage young people to be involved in our system, although they are less obvious. One example of this is a provision in the bill that prescribes penalties to owners of multiple-residence buildings who deny canvassers in their buildings. I came across that in both my by-election and the general election. I think it's unfortunate, once again, that the details of this provision are being left to regulation, but it's a good provision in theory and certainly important.

Now, most people look at that and say, "How does that help young people get involved?" Let me try to tell you—or "inform" you might be a better word. I think it's no secret that more and more young people in the province of Ontario can't afford to buy a house. We won't get into the reasons for that today, but it means those young people are living in apartment buildings or multiple-residence buildings. In turn, the people most negatively affected by canvassers and candidates not being able to get into those buildings are those young people. I think the provision will allow us better access to those buildings, which, in turn, means better access to those young people and, hopefully, since we are all good canvassers—how many here aren't good canvassers? Put your hands up. We're all good canvassers. It means that more of those young people will get out and vote.

There is another provision in this bill I would like to highlight because, again, I think it's one that will help get more young people involved in the process. The provision that I'm talking about now will allow the CEO discretion on how he or she is able to communicate directly to the electorate.

I'll finish up on my comments. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Fraser: It's a pleasure to respond to the member for Niagara Falls, as always. It's really interesting to listen to him debate.

I do want to say to the member, though, that I think, as far as relations and reconciliation with our indigenous population, this government has put it at the front of our agenda. I take what he's saying to heart on the aggregate act and some of the work that the minister is doing in that regard in terms of consultations to try and unify and make consistent the consultations we have with different ministries and our indigenous partners. There is a difference in the way the private sector does consultations. Our indigenous partners are diverse and we have to make sure that we relate to each other in a unified, consistent way.

I just want to respond to him in that way. I take his remarks as trying to be constructive. I just want to let him know what we're doing on this side.

I do say, for this act, that one of the things that I'm really very happy about is the registration of youth. Quebec and Nova Scotia do that at 16 and 17 years old. We do have to engage youth. We do have to make sure that they know about the process, that it's not a struggle when it's their first time to vote because they haven't

paid income tax and they haven't found themselves on the federal roll. I think that's really critical.

There are a number of other good measures in the bill. We've had a lot of back and forth this morning, and to and fro. I'm loath to mention Scarborough, but I do want to say that the issue of that letter never really having been resolved as to its origin and coming clean on it does add to cynicism. But there is also a question that never really got asked: Who paid for that letter? That was never fully answered.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I'm pleased to rise to respond to the member from Niagara Falls on the debate on Bill 45 and his comments related to it.

I think there's a real missed opportunity in Bill 45. One of the ongoing, regular complaints we get when we are running for election, when we are participating, is the frustration that people have with the electoral lists. Bill 45 doesn't resolve that.

I have no issue in having young people, 16 and 17, pre-register. The reality is, in Dufferin-Caledon, the vast majority of young people who choose to continue their education in post-secondary will leave our community at the age where they're about to embark on their voting career.

If we can pre-register those individuals to make that process smoother, I think that's a great thing, but we have a big gap that we have all seen, that we've all dealt with, and that is the accuracy of the election lists. The Chief Electoral Officer has referenced it in almost all of his reports that he's presented after every general election. I would have liked to see some actual, concrete improvements to ensure that we start with a cleaner, more accurate list at the beginning of our elections. I think that would encourage people to get out and vote. There's nothing more frustrating than going to the same voting station that you've gone to for 20 years to find that you're not on the list. It's very frustrating for people, to the point where they get angry and then they leave. That does nothing for our democracy. I wish Bill 45 had included more of that.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to congratulate my colleague the member for Niagara Falls on his remarks on this legislation.

One of the things he spent some time focusing on in his speech was about the importance of measures to engage more young people in the electoral process. Certainly, we welcome the initiative to register 16- and 17-year-olds in advance so that when they turn 18, their names are automatically added to the voters list and they can receive the voter card in the mail.

But at the same time, I think we can all learn a lot from what happened in the last federal election, with unprecedented numbers of young people showing up at the polls to vote. There was a study that was released by Samara that talked about the fact that 53% of young

Canadians talked about their voting experience with people they knew, compared to only a third of Canadians who were aged 56 or older. So young people are interested in politics, and one of the things that mobilizes them to participate is the issues. We know that we have a lot of work to do to make sure that the issues that young people care about are reflected in the platforms of our parties.

Yesterday, I presented a petition with 40,000 signatures from college and university students across this province calling on the government for a reduction and elimination of tuition fees, to convert loans to non-repayable grants and to remove the interest from existing student loans. We know that precarious work is a huge issue for young people. We have a lot of work to do in order to respond to the issues that are important to young people so that they see their concerns reflected in our platforms.

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The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments.

Hon. Michael Chan: I want to really thank the MPP from Niagara Falls for the remarks. I also want to congratulate the young people over there for being here today. Definitely, Bill 45 has a lot about young people voting. The introduction of the voter register—age 16 and age 17—definitely will enhance young people's interest and make the process much easier for them to participate when they reach the wonderful age of 18 years old.

I was a bit amazed by the MPP from Niagara Falls, who talked about the most recent by-election, the one in Scarborough—Rouge River. I happened to be there. Yes, there's a lot of confusion and many questions, but there are no answers. For example, you talk about the 13,000—which is a big, big number—letters signed by the opposition leader. Of course, nobody knows whether he actually signed the letter or someone signed the letter for him; that's one.

Also, another person who was running as an independent in the by-election, Queenie Yu—that also was a complex situation there, because when you looked at the website at the time, Queenie Yu actually was kind of like a PC member on the website. This is very strange, when you have two PC members running in the same riding. It's a lot of confusion in the end, and we need to get to the bottom of this.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Thank you, Minister. I return to the member from Niagara Falls to wrap up.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I just want to get a couple of points out, and then I'll address some of the comments. I thank all my colleagues for their comments.

This bill certainly gets some things right. It encourages participation among young people. It brings the communications of the CEO into the 21st century. It allows the actual process of voting to move forward by inviting the use of electronic voting machines.

But this bill has some flaws. This bill, I believe, does not adequately meet its stated goal of increasing representation of First Nations communities. This bill, like many others brought forward by the government, leaves too many details to regulation.

Madam Speaker, I want to be clear: I will be supporting this bill when it comes to a vote. But once again, I find myself needing to express a hope that this government will address the flaws in its own legislation through the committee process. I know we haven't seen that in a lot of our bills. But the other parties have good ideas when it comes to committees. You should listen to the other parties and get the bill right.

I want to finish up by addressing—I'm not going to get into the north, because I know my colleague NDP MPPs who were voted there will take care of that particular issue. But I will address young people. I know I'm supposed to talk to you, but I'm hoping they're listening—because I know I can't do this. I want to say to the young people that we're trying to get, this is your time—maybe not quite this young. What are the issues for young people? The issues for young people are the environment: We want to make sure we have clean water, clean air. We have to make sure, collectively, we do that between the three parties. Jobs: What type of jobs are there going to be for young people? The types of jobs that are out there today—we had a government at a higher level say that young people have to accept precarious work, that young people have to accept part-time work. I'm saying to the young people today: You don't have to accept that at all. You're going to school. You're one of the most—oh, I'm done.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Thank you. Further debate.

Mr. Chris Ballard: I just wanted to speak for a few minutes about Bill 45 and about how, in my opinion, it will really help bring young voters to the table. I go back to my days as a young person—I was young at one time. I had a full head of hair, and it was black, believe it or not.

Hon. Dipika Damerla: You still have a full head of hair.

Hon. Chris Ballard: I still have a fairly full head of hair; thank you very much. It depends where the camera shines from.

I only have so much time. Let me get back to the issue at hand rather than my hair. The issue was that, starting in high school, we were very fortunate to have teachers who engaged us in discussion about the political process, encouraged us to be involved in the political process and really demonstrated that even at a younger age, even when we weren't able to cast a vote, we could still influence those who were politicians. I recall getting involved with municipal politics as a young person when the region—the county of York, in those days—wanted to cut down a bunch of trees and widen roads. We got involved with that.

I remember getting involved as a young person in a whole bunch of areas that impacted, maybe not my life

immediately, but certainly we could see down the road. What it really took was adults to encourage us to get involved and to show us that our impact in those days could really mean something.

I fast-forward to sitting around a council table in Aurora. The discussion always was, "How do we get youth involved?" I always found it was fairly simple to get youth involved in our town decision-making: You had to invite them and you had to give them a meaningful role to play. Even though they weren't at the council table, you had to demonstrate that their voice was being heard and that you could show them where their voice was being heard. When we did that, we were quite successful in engaging youth.

I move forward a little bit more. I look at some of the ways that Bill 45 is going to engage youth. I'm so happy to see that, if passed, it will modernize the voting process and engage young people in this political process earlier by pre-registering them at 16 or 17 to let them know that they've got a few years to get engaged and to think about what's going on. It's my belief that, through that process, they will see us as treating them more as adults in an adult role and that we're preparing them to think about their future as voters and hopefully their future as legislators, as politicians.

I get tired of hearing the phrase, "Young people are our future." Well, young people are the future, but young people are current right now. Their needs today are our needs today. I think that that piece of legislation targeting 16- and 17-year-olds is absolutely critical to engaging younger people at a good time. I also think that it is really important for all of us here in the House, all elected officials, no matter what level of government, to engage with young people and get them interested in making decisions about their country, their community and their town.

The other thing about Bill 45 that intrigues me and that makes me quite happy is the establishment of the Far North Electoral Boundaries Commission to improve the representation of people living in Ontario's northernmost communities, including indigenous people. I know that most of the proposals that are contained in Bill 45 were based on Ontario's Chief Electoral Officer and his office's report—absolutely critical.

I don't have to tell anybody in this House—because most of us have done a lot of travelling in Ontario, whether individually in previous lives, perhaps, or as part of provincial committees. We've travelled this province. We understand that northern ridings really are unique. I know that each of us believes our riding is unique, but northern ridings perhaps are more unique than other ridings.

I certainly know, having spent time in the north, the challenges of geography: that it can take a northern MPP an entire day to travel from one side of their riding to another, with a number of small communities in between. It is difficult to stay in touch on a day-to-day basis, a weekly basis, with their constituents. Our government wants to improve representation of people living in

Ontario's northernmost communities, again, especially including indigenous people.

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If passed, this legislation aims to add two new ridings in the northernmost parts of our province, and we want to know how to do that in a way that's responsible, that's principled, and that will improve the state of representation in that area. We think an independent commission is the best way to ensure that any changes to the electoral boundaries in that region work in the interests of the people who live there.

Let me just go back for one second and talk a little bit about the pre-voter registration for 16- and 17-year-olds and, again, my strong belief that the earlier we engage young people in understanding the political process—getting involved in the political process right now is really important to making sure that they participate when they come of age to vote. The bill obviously is about encouraging youth participation. We know that Elections Ontario already does some good outreach to get youth interested in the electoral process. The process of registering on a provincial registry will give youth a new way to get involved. Some other countries are already doing this, I'm told, including some American states and Australia. Here in Canada, both Quebec and Nova Scotia currently have advance registration for 16- and 17-year-olds. As we've seen in these jurisdictions, creating this provincial registry can help engage youth in the election process before they're eligible to vote. And I guess, at the end of the day, we want young people to know that voting matters.

So, if passed, Bill 45 would modernize the voting process and would better engage people and make it easier for them to vote. The bill would engage young people in the political process by introducing that registry. It would make it easier to find advance polls by standardizing locations. It would establish a Far North Electoral Boundaries Commission.

Most of these proposals are based on the recommendations, as I said earlier, coming from Ontario's Chief Electoral Officer. In Ontario, we're facing that challenge of getting more than the 52% of people who voted out to vote.

I've sat through some of the debate around Bill 45 and I know that we have allowed debate to continue when we reached the six and a half hours of debate time—I was here when that moved on—so that more members from all sides would have an opportunity to present their views on the bill. The bill has seen more than nine and a half hours of debate, and we've had many of our members in this Legislature speak to the bill, as I said earlier. There has been considerable debate on this bill and we've heard a wide range of viewpoints, opinions and perspectives. In fact, during second reading, we heard members of the opposition and third party express their support for this important legislation. One member from the opposition, the member for Nepean–Carleton, said, "I think it's important that we bring in modern technology, which is why the Progressive Conservative Party and our caucus

will support this legislation.” The member for Bramalea–Gore–Malton said, “All told, this bill has a number of positive things and it’s something that we’re prepared to support.”

However, at this point, much of the debate is now repeating points already made by members and I’ve heard a number of those today, so it’s time that the bill is put to a vote for second reading and hopefully—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Okay, questions and comments?

Mr. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: I was paying attention to all of my colleagues about this important bill, and I’m so glad that our younger generation are here, our future leaders. You’re going to lead this great country. It’s very important that young people get involved in the election system, and the earlier the better. We are saying that we are borrowing this great planet from our future generations. So you are the leaders, and I’m so glad you guys are here.

Madam Speaker, I heard a lot of MPPs talking about my by-election in Scarborough–Rouge River, and I would like to add some comments there, too.

I ran as a PC MPP—I was very proud—and in my election, I got more than 10% from the second candidate—almost 2,500 votes. The one candidate ran on one issue, the sex education issue, and she got around 500 votes all together. I was knocking on almost every door, and only one person asked me about sex education. The major issue was—I’m going to repeat this—the major issue was the Liberal government waste over 13 years.

The second burning issue was skyrocketing hydro bills. One Chinese-Canadian lady said, “Councillor Cho, my electric bill rises every month. What’s happening?” Another issue was, how come the Liberal government just keeps ignoring Scarborough? Those are the major issues. Only one person asked about sex education. You tried to make a big issue out of almost nothing.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am pleased to contribute a couple of minutes to this important debate we’re having on Bill 45. Many of the members who have participated in the debate over the course of the last couple of weeks have really focused on the provisions in the bill to increase youth participation in the electoral process.

Absolutely, many of us agree that what is proposed, the provisional pre-registration of young people, is an important first step to motivate, to mobilize more young people to get out and vote on election day.

However, at the same time that we’re looking at what encourages young people to vote, we also have to look at what creates huge disincentives for young people to vote. One of those disincentives is cynicism. It’s cynicism about parties who promise one thing to get a vote and then don’t deliver.

We have seen cynicism on all levels of government. We recently saw the federal Liberal finance minister say to young people, “Precarious work is here to stay, so

you’d better get used to it.” That is not why young people wanted to participate in the last federal election.

We also saw this provincial government unroll banners that said, “Free tuition in this province.” And we know, students know, that what the provincial Liberal government is offering is not free tuition. It is not going to do what is needed to address the skyrocketing costs of post-secondary education, the mortgage-sized debts that young people are graduating with.

These are issues that young people care about. They want to see the parties that they elect deliver on the promises and do something to address these very real, tangible concerns that young people have.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Hon. Liz Sandals: I can’t help but notice that my colleague opposite has moved on to discussing a wonderful initiative from our budget, which is restructuring OSAP so that students who come from families with incomes under \$50,000 will actually get free college and university tuition.

I think what that actually demonstrates is that we’ve had a lot of debate on this bill—10 hours, almost. People have had an opportunity to express what they think about the actual bill. Pretty much anything you could say about the bill has been said. I know I had an opportunity to speak earlier in the week on the bill, which I firmly support. I think there are some great opportunities to have students pre-registered while they’re in high school and to get new election technology in there and actually take advantage of technology to make election day run more smoothly.

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There are lots of great things in this bill. I think we’ve all had the opportunity to discuss what we like and what we don’t like, so we really need to move on. We need to vote on the bill and we need to move on with getting it, I guess, to committee now because this is second reading, and see if there’s any fine-tuning that needs to be done. But I think we’ve pretty much exhausted the debate here at second reading.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It is very fitting that this morning we have a number of youth in the gallery with us to listen to this debate, because part of what we will be doing with this new bill will have an impact on them.

We have talked a lot about the changes in the bill to try to get youth to be more involved. If there’s an issue that I’m sure each and every one of those young people who are here with us care about, it’s their school. Yet, under this Liberal government, we see review after review of schools, and it always ends up the same way: Little schools in rural Ontario get closed down and then all of those kids get bused in to big, urban schools.

That makes no sense. It rips the guts out of the community. Once you don’t have a school in your community, you have no place to gather. You have no place to organize bake sales for the parents to get to

know one another, for the families to share activities together. This is wrong, and these certainly are issues that young people care about. They care about their schools.

If we want to engage them in politics, we have to respect what is important to them. The reason that 70% of youth don't bother to go vote is because what is important to them is not being treated with respect. They want to keep their school. I am so proud of the kids in Dowling, Chelmsford, Onaping and Lively who are mobilizing to keep their schools open because they are threatened with closure. I have seen this scenario before. Why don't we pay more attention to what those kids want us to pay attention to and treat them with respect? That would go a long way to bringing them to the polls.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Response?

Hon. Chris Ballard: I've been listening to debate around Bill 45, and frankly, I've heard a wide range of issue and topics, and I don't really need to hear any more debate.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm pleased to be able to join in the debate. Actually, I have a couple of things I want to speak about that are in the bill that I think deserve a little greater airing.

One of them is the notion of how to engage 16- and 17-year-olds, and at the same time, there is discussion within the ministry about removing the civics credit as a compulsory course. I can't imagine a greater fundamental contradiction for the people who have stood in this chamber and talked about the need for people of that age to get exposure and to have an understanding of the political process, particularly the electoral process, and at the same time talked about eliminating civics from the curriculum. I can't think of a group of people charged with the leadership of any jurisdiction—their country, their community—not recognizing the importance of making sure that they have engaged young people in the workings of the government, in the workings of their society and understanding how it works. So to suggest, by the same government, that civics isn't necessary but it's necessary to have a list of 16- and 17-year olds simply is fundamentally contradictory.

The second thing I want to look at, in the few moments that I have, is the question of the change in the timing of the election. While those speakers have discussed the daylight hours and conflicts with other community activities as reasons why it should be changed from October to June, I have something else to add to the discussion, and that goes back to 2003 and the election at that time. Since there was such a lot of controversy—as the accountants say, “Which do you want me to show you, a profit or a loss, a credit or a debit?” The government of the day thought that it was important that in subsequent elections there be a disciplined approach to understanding and a fulsome exposure of the government of the day and its finances because they felt that there had been problems with understanding and having full dis-

closure on the finances of the province going into an election.

By changing the date from the Thursday in October, this government then changes not only the daylight hours but also the ability of the Auditor General to have this document and this analysis in the hands of Ontarians, in the hands of candidates for all parties. I think it's really important to lay out the groundwork, which has allowed the Premier to revisit this and deny the opportunity for everyone in Ontario to have that exposure and transparency that the government is quick to refer to. Taking that away and making it impossible for people to have the benefit of the work of the Auditor General certainly flies in the face of the arguments they used back in 2003 when they wanted to give the Auditor General that kind of responsibility.

The issues, then, things like the advance poll—obviously, I think reducing the number of advance polls is shutting the door on the convenience of the voter, and we all want voters to feel that they are part of this process. To reduce them from 10 to five is quite considerable, particularly as going to an advance poll has become more popular. You see at every election a greater percentage of people who have cast their ballot early, and I think that's a good thing. To reduce the accessibility of individuals to reach that point is most unfortunate.

I'm just looking for some of the other issues.

By the way, going back on the issue of civics and the students' exposure to this, certainly the province has model Parliaments organized around the province for students to participate in. They see it in a microcosm way in student government. There are all those avenues that have been made available and should continue to be as well.

It's ironic that we should be discussing this bill under the circumstances that our province finds itself, with police investigations and things like that—very serious charges—and we are talking about making sure that 16- and 17-year-olds are on a list.

In the final few minutes that I have, I want to talk about that list. So many people on both sides of the House have talked about the voters list. I want to add my voice in that regard as well. It's a disaster every election. There are people who died years before who have never been taken off. You always get irate phone calls about that kind of thing. I think the electoral list would be one of the first things that this should address and should make easier for people.

1010

I mentioned the advance polls and the reductions in locations. The importance of the entrance into multi-resident buildings is something we should all agree with. I think some of the canvasser rules and things like that could be made easier, but I do think there has to be a greater understanding of the right to canvass in a multi-residence because, again, as other speakers have noted, it's an extremely important part of the electoral process, going door-to-door. All of us have lots of experience in doing that.

Again, I would suggest: the voters list, better understanding of access to buildings, these are certainly things that the bill suggests with which I would certainly agree. The enemy of democracy is cynicism and apathy and the voting process should be something that everyone can take as an expression of opportunities that fly in the face of that cynicism and apathy.

Finally, I just want to end on why we're doing this—why these various parts. The Chief Electoral Officer has also been able to make recommendations on sharing equipment and things like that which will make it more efficient and less expensive, which again is something that we would all want to support.

I just have one other thing that I suggested: that voting should be a positive experience. On the back of my car, it says, "Democracy: Don't Waste It." I would offer the comment to all of you that around the world, people are dying to have what we have.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Seeing as it's almost 10:15, I will be recessing the House until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1013 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mrs. Gila Martow: I'm pleased to welcome Sue Norman, whom I met at TIFF, the Toronto International Film Festival. I invited her to come visit us. She has never been in this building before, and we're so glad to see her. Thank you for coming, Sue.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: It is my pleasure to introduce some guests who are here this morning at the Legislature: Tracy Soares, Dakota Soares, Dylan Soares, Jayde Soares, Saige Soares, Sherry Dikih, Kayla Dikih, Jordan Dikih, Zachary Dikih, Josiah Dikih, Alicia Martens, Ben Martens, Alex Martens and Nathan Martens. Please welcome them to the Legislature today.

Hon. Helena Jaczek: Please help me welcome a resident of my riding—the great riding of Oak Ridges—Markham—and a student at the University of Toronto, Jeffrey Li, in the east members' gallery.

Mr. Bob Delaney: I direct members' attention to the members' east gallery to introduce a good friend and a Meadowvale resident, Mr. Masood Atchekzai, a former opponent who ran against me in the 2003 election. He is now a very good friend.

Mrs. Cristina Martins: It gives me great pleasure to rise in the House today to introduce guests of my amazing page, Bianca Morelli: her father, Jordan Morelli; her little brother, Matteo Morelli; her aunt, Mary Lizzotti; and her uncle, Tony Lizzotti. They're in the public gallery right out here. Jordan and Matteo are having an amazing time here. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. John Fraser: I would like to welcome to the assembly the members of the Ontario chiropractors' association and to remind everybody that they have a reception in room 228 right after question period.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: It is my distinct pleasure to rise and welcome Kingston resident Arthur Milnes and a group of 60 students from Calvin Park Public School in Kingston, who are here today to enjoy a Sir-Wilfrid-Laurier-themed walking tour with our Premier. A warm Queen's Park welcome to all, and I hope you enjoy your day.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I would like to introduce three visitors here today with the Professional Engineers Government of Ontario: George Collins, Ping Wu and Martin Haalstra. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I know that they've been introduced earlier, but I too want to welcome some homeschoolers here today from my riding: Sherry, Kayla, Jordan, Zachary and Josiah Dikih; Alicia, Ben, Alex and Nathan Martens; and, on behalf of Lambton-Kent-Middlesex, Tracy, Dakota, Dylan, Jayde and Saige Soares. Welcome. I hope you enjoy your day here.

I also want to say hi to Martin Haalstra from my riding. Welcome.

Mr. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: I'm very, very happy to welcome students from one of the best high schools in Toronto, Albert Campbell Collegiate Institute. They are in grade 10. Their teacher is Mr. Graham Bye. I hope that they have a great experience at Queen's Park today.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I would like to introduce my very good friend Howard Brown, who is over in the other gallery talking with Minister Zimmer at the moment.

Hon. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I would like to welcome a guest of page captain Riya Karumanchi. Her mother, Radhika Daggubati, is here in the public gallery this morning. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Todd Smith: I'd like to welcome Dr. Bruce Flynn, who is here with the Ontario Chiropractic Association. I had a chance to meet with him this morning briefly. Ayla Azad and Marg Harrington are also members of the Ontario Chiropractic Association. I would also like to welcome the son of a very good friend of mine from Prince Edward-Hastings: Ben Hendry joins us this morning, from the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We do have a special delegation in the Speaker's gallery today.

I have the honour of introducing the Right Honourable John Turner, who was the Prime Minister of Canada in 1984. With him is a delegation from Jamaica: the Minister of Health, Minister Christopher Tufton; Her Excellency Janice Miller, Jamaica's High Commissioner to Canada; and the consul general of Jamaica in Toronto, Lloyd Wilks. Welcome. They join us today from Jamaica. Joining the delegation are Donette Chang, Marc Kealey and Howard Shearer.

REPORT, FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICER

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that I have today laid upon the table a report from the Financial Accountability Officer entitled Economic

and Fiscal Outlook: Assessing Ontario's Medium-term Prospects.

There are no further introductions. Therefore it is time for question period.

ORAL QUESTIONS

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Steve Clark: Speaker, my question is for the Premier. The member from Simcoe–Grey is a man of great integrity. As Minister of Health, when the integrity of his office was called into question and his ministry was being investigated by the Integrity Commissioner, the member stepped aside as minister. He believed in the doctrine of ministerial responsibility and he did the right thing. He stepped aside until the investigation cleared his name.

Now that the Minister of Energy has been named in a charge laid by the OPP, the minister should also do the right thing. Mr. Speaker, has the Minister of Energy offered to step aside until the case against the Premier's former deputy chief of staff has concluded?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I know the member opposite understands that this is a matter that is before the courts. He understands also that there have been many, many questions asked and answered in this Legislature and outside of this Legislature.

We will continue to co-operate with any ongoing investigation, but the matter is before the courts and I know the member opposite understands that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Steve Clark: Back to the Premier: My predecessor as member for Leeds–Grenville took his role in this democratic institution very, very seriously. While there was an investigation, the Solicitor General stepped aside, and he returned when he was cleared of any wrongdoing. Premier, the Minister of Energy needs to do the same.

Mr. Speaker, will the Premier ask the minister to step aside until the case against her former deputy chief of staff has concluded?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Attorney General.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I just want to make one point very clear because I think it's important to note that the Minister of Energy is under no investigation, Speaker. There are no charges laid against the Minister of Energy, so the assertions the member opposite is making are absolutely incorrect.

I do want to remind again and echo what the Premier said. This matter is before the courts. There are allegations and charges laid against certain individuals. None of them serve in this Legislature, Speaker. We should let the courts handle the matter based on evidence and the rules of procedure and the evidentiary rules that apply in the courts, not in this Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm going to go back to the Premier. I'm puzzled by that answer. When the integrity of a minister or their office is called into question, the minister has a responsibility to step aside until the investigation is complete. When the member for Eglinton–Lawrence was criticized by the Auditor General for a scandal in his ministry, the member stepped aside.

Our current Minister of Energy has been named in a charge laid by the OPP, and he accuses them of wrongdoing. It is disrespectful to the office he holds to remain as a minister while the case is before the courts.

1040

Will the Premier demand that the minister step aside until the case against her former deputy chief of staff has concluded?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Start the clock. Be seated, please. Thank you.

Attorney General.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: The Minister of Energy is under no investigation. There have been no charges laid against the Minister of Energy. He has co-operated with all investigations that have taken place up to this point.

The member opposite knows very well your comments, Speaker, that you made yesterday in this House, and I'm sure he read them again last night. This matter is before the courts, and the only appropriate place for this matter to be tried or litigated is in a court of law.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Steve Clark: My question is for the Premier. I want to remind the Legislature of a time when Liberal ministers had integrity. The former Minister of Finance, Greg Sorbara—

Interjections.

Mr. Steve Clark: No, listen. Listen up.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Come to order. If I knew who said it, they'd have to withdraw, and if you did say it, you can withdraw without me telling you to.

Mr. Toby Barrett: If you're referring to me, I withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm not referring to anyone. I've made it clear. Are you withdrawing?

Mr. Toby Barrett: Yes.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Carry on.

Mr. Steve Clark: Former Minister of Finance Greg Sorbara resigned from his office when he became aware of a search warrant alleging he was the subject of an RCMP investigation. His name was simply in a search warrant, and he stepped aside until his name was cleared. Now we have a top Liberal aide being accused of bribing a minister of the crown, and the minister still holds office. This is incredibly inappropriate.

Why does the Premier refuse to have the minister step aside until the case against her former deputy chief of staff has concluded?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As the Attorney General has said, the Minister of Energy is under no investigation. This matter is before the court. The member opposite knows full well that we need to let that court process unfold, not in this Legislature but within the court system.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Steve Clark: Back to the Premier: At no time have I accused the minister of wrongdoing, but the charges against Pat Sorbara speak for themselves. She is accused of offering an alleged bribe to the current Minister of Energy. Regardless, being named in a charge is unbecoming of a minister of the crown, and the minister must step aside.

Will the Premier turn to the minister, extend her hand and accept his letter of resignation?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Start the clock. Be seated, please. Thank you.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Attorney General.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I appreciate the theatrics on the other side from the member opposite. Let's be absolutely clear: The Minister of Energy is under no investigation whatsoever. Charges have been laid against two individuals who do not serve in this Legislature. The matter is before the courts, and that's where it should be tried and litigated.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Steve Clark: Back to the Premier: This Liberal government has killed a lot of traditions in this province, but it's sad to say that they've killed the tradition—actually, no, the duty—of ministerial responsibility. There used to be a time when ministers took their integrity seriously and believed they had to have the trust of the province, but that no longer exists in Liberal Ontario.

One last time, I implore the Premier: Please, do the right thing. Will you stand up, Premier, walk over to the minister's desk and ask him to resign?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Attorney General?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Once again, the minister is under no investigation. The allegations in question that are now before the courts have nothing to do with the minister's responsibility as Minister of Energy either. There is no nexus; there is no connection. This is a totally separate matter that does not involve the minister and his responsibilities as the Minister of Energy.

The most appropriate place for this matter to be dealt with is in a court of law. It is for a reason. The rule is stated in our standing order rules. Speaker, you referred to it very clearly yesterday. I ask the member opposite and all honourable members of this House to respect the rules that are laid out in our standing orders and let this matter be dealt with in the court of law.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question is to the Premier. There is very clearly an allegation of bribery against Ms. Sorbara. The allegation of bribery also includes a second allegation that is inferred. When you allege to bribe someone, there is also a potential of someone accepting that bribery. That's another allegation, a potential allegation.

During this investigation—it's before the courts, absolutely. The honourable thing to do in this circumstance is to have the minister step down while this investigation is going on. He's connected in some way. Why hasn't the Premier yet accepted the resignation of the Minister of Energy? Why not?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Attorney General.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I will say to the member opposite that he used the word "allegation" perhaps three or four times, and he's right: These are just allegations. The only place for those allegations to be proven, right or wrong, is in a court of law, not in this Legislature. There is a long-standing rule that relates to matters not being litigated in this House if they're before a court or a tribunal.

The member opposite is a learned counsel. I know his rules well. He's been a defence counsel. He understands the notion and the important principle of presumption of innocence. I only ask him to respect those, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I think the government doesn't understand what's going on here. This is not a matter of litigating the case. No one's trying to litigate the case here, and if you have that belief, you're clearly mistaken. This is a matter of integrity. The people of Ontario deserve a government with integrity. They deserve a Premier who puts the interests of the people of this province ahead of her party, of her friends, of protecting people in cabinet positions.

Given the very serious nature of the allegations—and yes, they are allegations, but they are very serious. Given the serious nature of these allegations, there is a responsibility for the Premier to do something. Does the Premier think it's appropriate for the minister to continue in cabinet while these allegations are ongoing?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Absolutely, the matter is serious. Therefore, the matter should not be dealt with in a partisan environment like question period. That's why that particular rule exists.

These are allegations that have to be dealt with in front of an impartial judge. That is why we've got independence between the judiciary, the executive and our legislative arm. We should all respect those very important divisions of power. We should not be litigating allegations, conjectures, speculations and queries in this House.

I urge the members opposite again: We should let this matter to be dealt with in a court of law.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, I urge the government to review these questions in Hansard. There's no litigation of the offence here. I'm not litigating the offence; I'm simply saying that the people of this province deserve a government with integrity. When you have allegations that involve a cabinet minister, there are certain responsibilities that this government must act on.

It's very clear that this has never happened in the history of this province ever before, where we have a cabinet minister who is involved in allegations. The allegations involve his name, involve a bribe of the minister of this crown. It's very clear; the allegations are absolutely clear.

Why will the minister not step down and prove to Ontarians that they're capable of putting aside their blind partisanship, that they're capable of putting the interests of the people of this province ahead of their own party's interests? Why can't they do the honourable thing?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Be seated, please.

Attorney General?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, I think the member opposite knows—and I know he's doing his very best to stretch this issue. The allegations in question have nothing to do with the minister's responsibility as the Minister of Energy. The allegations are not towards the Minister of Energy. The government and the Premier remain very focused on their responsibilities and their obligations to the people of Ontario.

1050

This is a matter that is before the courts, Speaker, and the member opposite knows very well that it should be litigated before the courts, not in this Legislature.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, my question, again, is to the Premier. I think the government needs to get new speaking notes. No one is talking about litigating this case. We're asking a very clear thing here. During the last provincial election, this Premier promised Ontarians that she would be different. She promised the people that, under her leadership, this party would not be riddled with scandals—like her predecessor's was. Yet again, the people of this province are disappointed.

Will the Premier put aside her blind partisanship, in terms of protecting her party, and protect the people's interests; put aside her blind partisanship and support the needs of the people of this province and ask the Minister of Energy to simply step aside during these very serious allegations?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The member opposite is asking us to focus on the people of Ontario. Mr. Speaker, I just want to say that every morning when I get up and every morning when we begin our work here, we are focusing on the people of Ontario. We're focusing on the young people in our schools. We're focusing on the seniors who need support in hospitals and in their homes.

We're focusing on the needs of the municipalities to have infrastructure. All of that is the work that we are all—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, come to order. Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: That is the work of our government. That is the plan that we are implementing.

I have been very open with the media. I've been open in the Legislature. I have answered questions over and over again. I said in 2015 that if and when there were charges laid, Pat Sorbara would step aside. Pat Sorbara has stepped aside. She has done exactly what I said would happen. Now the matter is before the courts and we—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Prince Edward–Hastings, come to order.

Supplementary?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, it shouldn't take criminal charges for the government to display that they have integrity. It shouldn't require that. This is yet another example of the Premier allowing her concern for her party to take precedence over the responsibilities of governing this province, which are the responsibilities of the Premier. It's Liberals protecting Liberals again.

Will the Premier for once stop being so blindly partisan and put the province's interests first? Understand that faith in this government is being questioned right now—the province has a responsibility to ensure that that faith is kept strong—and ask the minister to step aside during these allegations.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'm not a lawyer, but the member opposite is a lawyer, so he knows we're not talking about criminal charges, Mr. Speaker, even though he uses that language, I assume, intentionally. I can't second-guess that, but I assume he uses that intentionally. These are not criminal charges we're talking about.

I said in 2015 that if and when charges were laid, Pat Sorbara would step aside. She has stepped aside. She has done that.

Our responsibility—all of us—is to understand that, under a presumption of innocence, that matter is now before the courts. I would expect, of all of the members in the NDP—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, second time. The Minister of Indigenous Relations, come to order.

Supplementary?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, did the Premier learn nothing from waiting so long to dismiss her top aide over this scandal? She said over and over in this assembly that she stood by Ms. Sorbara and that Ms. Sorbara had done nothing wrong. Yet here we are, two days after Ms. Sorbara was charged by the OPP, and the Premier is making the same mistake again. She has an

opportunity to do the right thing. They are allegations—absolutely, they are allegations—and the minister and everyone involved in this is entitled to the presumption of innocence. But there's a certain perception here. There's a perception that there is an allegation involving the minister. There's a bribery allegation of that minister. That minister has a responsibility to step aside during this investigation. It's the right thing to do. So will the Premier do the right thing and ask her Minister of Energy to step aside until this matter is dealt with?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Attorney General.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Attorney General?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Once again, Speaker, in terms of the actions she's taken, when Ms. Sorbara was charged under the Election Act offences, the Premier took the step of showing she no longer works for the Ontario Liberal Party.

In this matter, there are no allegations that relate to the Minister of Energy. There are no allegations that relate to his responsibility as the Minister of Energy. These are allegations that are very separate and aside from the business of this House. The only appropriate venue, the only right place for that matter to be dealt with is in the court of law. I know the member opposite knows and expects all members to respect that very important principle in our legislative democracy.

GOVERNMENT FISCAL POLICIES

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Finance. We know that there's a trust deficit in the government. Now we know there's a financial deficit as well.

This morning the Financial Accountability Officer confirmed what our PC caucus has been saying all along: the government has a multi-billion-dollar hole in their budget forecast. He confirmed the government is using one-time money from the sale of assets to artificially balance the budget in an election year. But the FAO expects a \$2.6-billion deficit that year, when the minister told Ontarians they balanced.

The FAO also told us that the only way they are going to balance after that is to raise taxes again or cut services further. Through you, I ask the minister: Are they raising taxes again, or can we expect more cuts to front-line services?

Hon. Charles Sousa: I'd like to thank the FAO for his report. I hope he recovers soon; as we all know, he's on medical leave. But let me start by saying, yet again, that we're committed to balancing the budget by 2017-18 and again the year after that, Mr. Speaker. We are doing so by controlling our spending and by stimulating economic growth in some of the strategic investments that we made. The FAO himself has stated Ontario's economy posted strong, real GDP growth—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It's very difficult to move forward when members on the same side as the answer being put are engaged in heckling back and forth, so let's just stop, please.

Hon. Charles Sousa: They don't want to hear what exactly has happened. What has happened is that we've beaten our target seven years in a row, Mr. Speaker. What has happened is that because of our strategic investments, we have outpaced the G7—the United States and every other country in the jurisdiction, as well—and by so doing, we are lowering unemployment and growing our economy.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Back to the minister: Well, the numbers are wrong. We've been telling this government the numbers are wrong and now the FAO confirmed that today. The FAO said, "Growth in business investment has been disappointing over the last four years." Well, that's no wonder, Speaker, given this government has raised taxes by more than 20% in the last five years.

The FAO also confirmed that debt levels will continue to skyrocket another \$64 billion, to a record \$370 billion. Under this government, Ontario is now both the most indebted, yet the most taxed, province in Canada.

It's clear their repeated pattern of waste, mismanagement and scandal has come home to roost, Speaker. I ask the minister, through you: Will the fall economic statement recognize the fiscal risks revealed by the FAO and will he update his false projections in this budget?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, the fall economic statement will indeed talk about the challenges faced by all countries and jurisdictions around the world, and recognize the leadership that Ontario has taken to ensure that we come to balance by 2017-18 and thereafter. The FAO states that Ontario's economy "posted strong real GDP growth over the second half of 2015 and into the first quarter of 2016." He also said that he expects that because of the strategic investments that we're making, a boost to growth will occur in the third quarter.

1100

Mr. Speaker, what has actually happened? Merchandise exports have increased by 10% in the province of Ontario. Wholesale trade has been up by 7%. Retail sales are up by 6% and manufacturing sales were up by 7%.

We recognize the challenges. We're controlling, and being disciplined in, our spending. We are investing in our future, in our growth, to grow the economy and come to balance as we said we would. We've exceeded and surpassed our targets every year for the last seven years.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la première ministre. On Tuesday, Pat Sorbara was charged under the Election Act with allegedly bribing the current Minister of Energy. The charge, implicating the Minister of Energy, has shaken the trust of the good people of Sudbury. If the Premier agrees that trust is critical to our

electoral system, will she ask the minister to resign from her cabinet?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Attorney General.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, as I have said on numerous occasions before in this question period, this matter is before the courts. The only appropriate place for this matter to be dealt with is in the court of law. I urge all members to respect that very important principle.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Formal charges have been laid by the OPP against Ms. Sorbara that name Glenn Thi-beault. We can all read it. This is about the good people of Sudbury being able to trust their elected representative. When an MPP is implicated—his name—in a bribery charge, trust in that MPP is obviously thrown into question.

Will the Premier do the right thing by the good people of Sudbury and ask the Minister of Energy to resign his cabinet position?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: The Minister of Energy, the member from Sudbury, is an honourable man. He has, in his entire life, served his community. He has served—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Finish, please.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, the member serves his family and his community with utmost integrity. These allegations have nothing to do with the member and his responsibilities as the Minister of Energy.

As I've said before, this matter is before the courts. The only appropriate place for it to be tried is in a court of law.

ROAD SAFETY

Mr. John Fraser: My question is for the Minister of Transportation. Despite the recent warm weather we've seen over the last few days, winter is coming. That means we are quickly approaching shorter days and more hours of darkness.

Safety on our roads is always a priority, but it's clear that when there are more hours of darkness, we need to take more care on our roads. We know that certain road users, specifically cyclists and pedestrians, are at higher risk on our roads.

Mr. Speaker, in my riding of Ottawa South, I just learned there was a cyclist struck this morning. Every few days, I hear of a pedestrian or cyclist being struck. Road safety is of great concern to all members of this House and for those people they represent.

Mr. Speaker, I'm particularly interested to hear about what the government is doing with pedestrians in mind. Could the minister please inform this House what we are doing in this regard?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I want to begin, of course, by thanking the member from Ottawa South for the question and for his advocacy on this issue.

Unfortunately, last evening—and over the course of the last number of weeks a number of pedestrians and other road users like cyclists have been hit by vehicles in

cities like Toronto and in others across the province. Of course, this is extremely unfortunate for all of us to hear, but it does go to show that we all have a collective responsibility both to do more and to do better.

With darker conditions—and in this case, recently, rainy conditions as well—there is an increased risk for collisions.

I should also point out that this coming weekend, the clocks are changing. It's particularly at this time of year that issues relating to road safety are of particular importance.

I purposely said "collisions" and not "accidents." That's because many of the collisions that we're discussing on our roadways are, in fact, preventable. In my follow-up answer, I'll talk a little bit more about a promotional campaign that's under way to shed light on this issue.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. John Fraser: I thank the minister for that answer. I'm glad that he used the word "collisions," because many of these things are preventable. I'm glad the ministry is working so closely with their road safety partners.

I know that in the city of Ottawa, the Ottawa police and their STEP program are focusing right now on red-light and stop-sign runners. I want to congratulate them for their work.

As the minister noted in his answer, we're all going to be returning to our ridings next week, something I'm sure we're all looking forward to. I know that this issue is of top priority to the people that we represent: safety on roads and safety, especially in my riding, of children going to school. I heard of one yesterday being struck by a vehicle.

This is of great concern to us all. I'd like to ask the minister again to further elaborate on what we're doing for pedestrian safety.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Again, I thank the member for the follow-up question.

Just this past Wednesday, I was very happy to participate, alongside a number of our road safety partners, at a pedestrian safety event. This particular campaign's slogan is "Be Alert, Be Seen." I think this is a critical message for all of our road users, particularly those that are pedestrians or are cycling. I want to encourage all members of the House to help spread the word around this particular campaign.

Over the years, our government has increased penalties for drivers by both introducing and increasing demerit points for violations at high-risk, high-impact locations on our roads. Everyone here will know that in June of 2015, Bill 31 passed this Legislature with all-party support. This important piece of legislation requires drivers, for example, to yield the whole roadway to pedestrians at school crossings and pedestrian crossovers. It also provides municipalities with the option to request crossing devices on low-speed, low-volume roads.

Our work is not done. The Ministry of Transportation will continue to work with road partners to make sure that we get it right.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: We know Gerry Lougheed Jr. believes he had the ability to offer “appointments, jobs, whatever” to candidates in Sudbury. But what we don’t know is: Who ordered the Premier’s deputy chief of staff and top Liberal fundraiser to offer Andrew Olivier and the current Minister of Energy an alleged bribe?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Attorney General.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I would ask of the member opposite—I think he knows very well exactly what the rules in this House are and that this is a matter that is before the courts, and it’s highly inappropriate for him to ask that question or for anyone to ask those questions.

Mr. Paul Miller: Bob and weave; bob and weave.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

Supplementary? The member from Whitby–Oshawa.

Mr. Lorne Coe: To the Premier: We know that just one day before Gerry Lougheed offered Mr. Olivier “appointments, jobs, whatever,” Pat Sorbara called the deputy director of HR in the Premier’s office of public appointments and human resources on December 10. But what we don’t know is: Who ordered the Premier’s deputy chief of staff and top Liberal fundraiser to offer Andrew Olivier and the current Minister of Energy an alleged bribe?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, again, these are allegations that have not been proven in the court. The court will decide the veracity of these allegations. In the meantime, we have a very important principle; that is, the presumption of innocence. I ask and I expect all members will respect that very important principle. It would be highly inappropriate for us to answer any questions relating to this matter in the House, given that the matter is before the courts.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question is to the Attorney General. It’s very clear in the Election Act that directly or indirectly giving or procuring an inducement to get someone to run is in contravention of the Election Act. We learned yesterday that one of Pat Sorbara’s charges has to do with allegedly inducing the Minister of Energy.

These charges are an issue of public trust and confidence in this government. Does the Attorney General think that the same rules should apply to anyone who accepts a position or a benefit to run for office?

1110

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: The member is asking a question in light of an allegation that is contained in the charges that were laid—number one. Number two, she’s asking for my legal interpretation. I’m not a legal expert in the matters of the Election Act. Number three, I would rely on the courts to determine and interpret that particular provision, and also as it relates to the allegations. That is exactly why it is highly inappropriate for these matters to

be discussed in this House. I urge all members to let the courts do their job and not litigate this matter in the House.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Again to the Attorney General: I do find it interesting that a government under the shadow of scandal, dealing with alleged bribery, thinks that they can unilaterally change or interpret election laws in Ontario.

Yesterday, our deputy leader filed a complaint with Elections Ontario asking the Chief Electoral Officer to investigate the Minister of Energy. The Minister of Energy is on the record as saying, “The Premier and I had a conversation about roles within government.” The role of a backbencher? The role of a minister? We don’t know. But we do want to know.

In the opinion of the Attorney General, why does the Premier think that the rules only apply to some people and not all?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: This matter is very clear. There are allegations that are made against two individuals who do not serve in the House. The allegations do not relate to any responsibility of the Minister of Energy. Asking any such question, in my view, is not relevant. Any allegations that are to be dealt with in this House ought to be dealt with in a court of law.

This is not the place for the member opposite to seek my legal interpretation on a particular provision of law, or for me to offer those interpretations. That’s exactly the role of our courts. I trust our judiciary, and I urge all members to leave this matter before the courts.

ONTARIO TRILLIUM FOUNDATION

Mrs. Cristina Martins: My question this morning is to the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport. I know that members of this House value the important work that the Ontario Trillium Foundation does to build healthy and vibrant communities across Ontario.

Last week, Minister McMahon was in Brampton to announce the most recent round of grants that have been approved by the Trillium Foundation. As part of this announcement, the minister also spoke to a broader province-wide commitment to support grant recipients across Ontario.

In my own riding of Davenport, the Centre for Mindfulness Studies and Native Women in the Arts received over \$50,000 through Trillium to help people who are marginalized as they take on leadership roles and improve community life. These programs have an impact on the lives of over 180 people in the community.

Mr. Speaker, through you, can the minister please inform this House about this most recent round of grants and the important impact that this round of Trillium Foundation grants will have?

Hon. Eleanor McMahon: I’m pleased to rise and answer the member’s questions about the Ontario Trillium Foundation, and I want to thank her for the

important advocacy work that she does in her community on behalf of the not-for-profit sector. It's so important.

I greatly value the important work that Trillium does right across our province. It's important that we acknowledge it and that our government remain supportive of the Trillium Foundation. It is one of Canada's leading charitable grant-making foundations, and it helps us build strong and healthy communities.

I was pleased to visit the Brampton Multicultural Community Centre last week to announce that the Trillium Foundation will be investing \$31.6 million through 152 grants right across Ontario, bringing positive change to the people of Brampton, the member's riding as well, and nearly 500,000 Ontarians in every corner of our province.

Speaking to members of this House, I'm already hearing about the positive impact that this investment will have, and I'm excited to announce that we're going to continue to support the Ontario Trillium Foundation. I look forward to expanding on my answer in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Cristina Martins: I want to thank the minister for this. It is fantastic to hear how wide-reaching and helpful the Trillium Foundation has been to my community of Davenport and to communities all across this province.

I also want to acknowledge the importance of the hundreds of dedicated and knowledgeable volunteers who make up grant review teams across the province. Each year, more than 3,000 applications are reviewed by grant review teams who act as local eyes and ears for the Trillium Foundation. They play a vital role in our province's not-for-profit sector. It's important that the Trillium Foundation have processes in place to ensure that the best applications ultimately receive funding.

I understand that the Trillium Foundation moved forward with a plan last week to improve customer service to applicants across Ontario. Can the minister please speak to this development and the role it will have on the Trillium Foundation's granting process?

Hon. Eleanor McMahon: Thank you to the member. Our government greatly values the work that the Ontario Trillium Foundation does to help applicants right across our province, and that's why I'm pleased that the foundation is moving forward with a number of changes that will improve customer service.

Specifically, the Trillium Foundation is moving to introduce a single application deadline for each of its funding programs. This brings the foundation in line with industry best practices adopted by other granting organizations such as the Ontario Media Development Corp. and the Ontario Arts Council. Ultimately, these steps are about modernization and improving customer service.

As a former grant recipient, I very much appreciated the support that I got from Trillium and I applaud their board for taking these additional steps to improve service delivery. As we move forward toward our province's 150th anniversary, I look forward to working with Tril-

lium to support communities across Ontario and to continuing to make a difference in the lives of all Ontarians.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: My question is to the Premier. We know that Gerry Lougheed Jr. told Andrew Olivier that he was calling "on behalf of the Premier." But what we don't know is who ordered the Premier's deputy chief of staff and a top Liberal fundraiser to offer Andrew Olivier and the current Minister of Energy an alleged bribe. Speaker, through you to the Premier, who gave the order?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Attorney General.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, this question has been asked many times, and just because it's being asked in a repeated manner does not mean that the answer changes. The Premier has been very open and transparent to Ontarians, to the media and to this Legislature and has answered many questions.

Now we are at a stage, Speaker, as you are well aware and as the members in this House are well aware, where charges have been laid. It would be highly inappropriate for this matter to be dealt with in this House. It would be highly inappropriate to answer any questions in this House as it relates to the allegations. The only appropriate place is in a court of law, and I'd ask all members to respect that very important principle.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary? The member from Thornhill.

Mrs. Gila Martow: My question is to the Premier. We know that Pat Sorbara told Andrew Olivier, "So you're being asked ... to make the sacrifice this time, and that also can go a long way, in terms of opening up options ... like in terms of being part of a party, right?"

But what we don't know, Mr. Speaker, is who ordered the Premier's deputy chief of staff and a top Liberal fundraiser to offer Andrew Olivier and the current Minister of Energy an alleged bribe.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Again, Speaker, you can tell by the nature of questions that these are questions that relate directly to the allegations that are before the courts. As I've stated earlier, it would be highly inappropriate to answer any questions on an issue that is before the courts.

I would urge all members to respect a very important rule that is outlined in our standing orders, the rule around sub judice, which instructs us not to debate issues, not to discuss issues, that are before any court or tribunal. This matter clearly falls under that rule. So I ask all members, Speaker, to respect your words yesterday. We will not be answering any questions that are before the courts.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is to the Minister of Energy. Given his role in the Premier's cabinet as Minister of Energy and the recent news about being named in an alleged scandal, Ontarians have questions about

whether or not he will be able to perform his job duties as a cabinet minister. Ontarians want to know: Has the minister offered his resignation to the Premier?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I'm very pleased to rise and speak to this—

Applause.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, no, I have not. Absolutely all of these are allegations. I stand with integrity and work for the people of Sudbury, which I was elected to do. I'm very proud to be part of a government that is working for the people of Ontario each and every day. This is all allegations—

Interjection.

1120

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Nepean—Carleton will withdraw.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That's your second time.

Finish, please.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Now that charges are laid in this case, it is our shared responsibility to allow this matter to be handled in the court of law under the presumption of innocence.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Back to the Minister of Energy: People have a right to raise questions about the minister's ability to do his job while being named in an alleged scandal. Why does the Minister of Energy believe he will be able to focus on and complete his ministerial duties under the shadow of scandal? Will he offer his resignation to the Premier?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Attorney General.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I think we heard from the minister on how he is an honourable individual who works extremely hard and serves his community, the people of Ontario and this government with full integrity. There are no allegations in relation to the member. The allegations do not involve whatsoever his responsibilities as a minister, and there are no charges that are laid against the member as well.

He has fully co-operated in all investigations. There are now charges laid against two individuals who do not serve in the House. This matter is before the courts. We should respect their jurisdiction. I ask all members to let the court do its job.

TRANSFER PAYMENTS

Ms. Daiene Vernile: My question is for the President of the Treasury Board. Each year for the past seven years, our government has beaten the deficit reduction target put forth in the budget. This past year was no different. The province of Ontario beat its deficit target by \$3.5 billion—

Mr. Paul Miller: How about the debt? Talk about the debt.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, second time.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Durham.

Finish, please.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: I know that Ontario is on track to balancing the budget for 2017-18. That will please the heckling member to hear that.

Much of this success is due to innovative cross-government transformation projects designed to save money while also improving outcomes for the people of Ontario, projects like the Transfer Payment Administration Modernization, or TPAM.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Prince Edward—Hastings, second time.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: Could the President of the Treasury Board please tell us about TPAM? Tell us how this project is helping the government.

Hon. Liz Sandals: Thank you to the member for Kitchener Centre for her advocacy on government modernization.

The Transfer Payment Administration Modernization project, or TPAM for short, is intended to streamline and modernize the government's approach to the management of transfer payments. Ontario makes transfer payments to more than 18,000 different organizations—to hospitals, school boards, municipalities, non-profits and many more. Approximately 82% of all government expenditures are transfer payments, funds which are actually flowed through more than 20,000 different legal agreements and supported by 20 different IT applications.

Treasury Board's TPAM project will reduce administrative burden for both government and transfer payment recipients while improving our ability to make evidence-based funding decisions.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Daiene Vernile: The President of the Treasury Board just provided us with an excellent introduction to what TPAM is and how it's driving efficiencies.

I know first-hand the impact of transfer payments. Since 2003, our government has provided Waterloo region \$63 million in funding for affordable housing, assisting in the creation and repair of over 1,400 affordable units and preventing over 1,800 evictions.

Last year, our government provided \$1 billion in transfer payments to the Waterloo Wellington Local Health Integration Network, which supports 34,000 virtual care visits in Waterloo Wellington in 2015-16, bringing care close to home through video conferencing for many people who have difficulty travelling to see their doctor.

Would the President of the Treasury Board please tell us what is next for the TPAM project?

Hon. Liz Sandals: As the member knows, one of our goals through TPAM is to develop a one-window portal where a given transfer recipient need only input their information once. That means that organizations that receive multiple transfer payments from multiple ministries often will not have to enter and enter and enter their information multiple times. They would only need to upload one copy of various important documents, instead of re-entering it for each application.

As a starting point, the Treasury Board Secretariat is focusing on creating a common registration system to support that process for all time-limited and project-based transfer payments managed through Grants Ontario. Over the next two years, we'll add more transfer payment systems to the common registration system.

This is just one of a number of projects that are modernizing our transfer payment system, saving money and reducing unnecessary burden for our transfer payment partners.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Rick Nicholls: To the Premier: We know that Pat Sorbara told Andrew Olivier: "If there were other things that you're particularly interested in that is within her realm to make you part of, then she is more than prepared to do that."

Speaker, we're not getting any answer as to who ordered the Premier's deputy chief of staff and top Liberal fundraiser to offer Andrew Olivier and the current Minister of Energy an alleged bribe.

So, Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: Will you invite your Minister of Energy to step aside until this issue is resolved?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, I've been very open with this Legislature, with the media and with the public about the allegations related to the Sudbury by-election, over and over again. I have answered questions. If you look at the Hansard from that time, you can see the number of questions that I answered.

Now that charges are laid, it's our responsibility to understand that this matter is before the court, and it's before the court under a presumption of innocence. We're going to continue to co-operate with any independent investigation. But, as I said in 2015, if charges were laid, then Pat Sorbara would step aside. That has happened, and now the matter is entirely before the courts.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary? The member from Prince Edward-Hastings.

Mr. Todd Smith: Back to the Premier. We know that Pat Sorbara had a discussion with Andrew Olivier about a role. As a matter of fact, I was just listening to the video before coming down here. It's on Andrew Olivier's YouTube. Anyone can hear it, and they can see what kind of backroom deals and shenanigans these guys have been up to for themselves.

Pat Sorbara says, "Whether it's a full-time or a part-time job in a constit office, whether it is appointments, supports or commissions"—was up for discussion.

But what we don't know is: Who over there ordered the Premier's deputy chief of staff and a top Liberal fundraiser to offer Andrew Olivier and the current Minister of Energy a bribe?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Attorney General.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Again, these are just allegations. They have not been proven in the courts. The fact that there are charges laid means that this matter has to be tried before a court, not in the Legislature.

Not to mention, I know the members opposite and all members of this House, as all Ontarians and Canadians, understand and respect the principle of presumption of innocence. In our system, everybody is presumed innocent until they are proven guilty. In this matter, the people who have been charged have not been found guilty. We owe it to them that we let this matter be dealt with in a court of law, in a neutral, impartial sphere.

That is how our system is designed, for very good reason. That is why we have a separation between our executive branch and our legislative branch, and we should respect that.

1130

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. John Vanthof: My question is to the Premier. As holders of elected office, we are responsible—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The chief government whip is warned.

Finish, please.

Mr. John Vanthof: As holders of public office, we are responsible for the public's trust. I'm sure all of us, in our various offices, have always heard that the perception of conflict of interest is as damaging as the actual—if it exists—conflict of interest.

In this case, the perception of wrongdoing is as damaging to the actual public interest as if wrongdoing occurred. We don't know if wrongdoing has occurred. That is for the courts to decide. But for the public trust it has also been the tradition, if there is a question of wrongdoing, for a person who holds public office to step aside while that investigation is conducted. As a minister of the crown, it is inherent to do that.

My question to the Premier is: Why haven't you instructed that to happen?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Attorney General.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I again thank the member opposite, who I have a lot of respect for, for the question. I was listening very carefully to his question, and I would say to him that there is no conflict of interest here. There is no actual or perceived conflict of interest.

The allegations do not deal with anything that is a responsibility of the minister as the Minister of Energy. The allegations, Speaker, are not towards him. The minister has not been charged with anything, so there is no conflict of interest—actual or perceived—whatsoever.

There are allegations against two individuals who do not sit in this House. Those allegations are before the court of law. The rules of this House are very clear: When there is a matter before the courts, it is best that it be dealt with in the courts, not in this Legislature. I know the member knows the rules, and I implore him to respect that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. John Vanthof: Back to the Premier: It hasn't been proven yet whether or not there is actual wrongdoing, and that's not the point. The point is the public trust. There is precedent for this. There's a long-standing parliamentary tradition of cabinet members standing aside when investigations take place, and it's not just when they're part of the investigation. When then-finance minister Greg Sorbara was named—named—in a search warrant in 2005—named, not charged—he stepped aside until the matter was dealt with. That was the honourable thing to do. That's what an honourable minister does and that's what an honourable Premier should make her minister do.

The Premier has the chance to do the right thing and ask her minister to resign while this investigation is going on. Will she do that?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Attorney General?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, to the member again: There is no investigation as it relates to the Minister of Energy. There are no charges against the Minister of Energy. I think that is a very important point that the member opposite is missing.

Yes, he can get emotional and yes, he can try to sully somebody's honour—which, Speaker, is very much not in the tradition of this House. We respect every member of this House as an honourable member. I think of the member opposite who has posed this question as an honourable member, Speaker. It is highly inappropriate. I know he's above that, to cast into disrepute any member of this House—especially since they are under no investigation. There have been no charges laid against them.

The charges, Speaker, have been laid against two individuals who are not members of this House. They are not in the employ of the government of Ontario. We should respect the rules. We should respect the traditions. We should respect the principle of the presumption of innocence.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: My question is for the Minister of International Trade.

It's been a very busy fall for international trade. In October, the minister visited New York City to discuss water technology and innovation, and the federal government successfully signed the Canada-European Union trade agreement.

This month, the minister will be visiting India on an agri-food trade mission—and we know how important the agri-food sector is to this province—and the Premier will be conducting a trade mission to Japan and to Korea.

I know that Ontario is going to see a lot of economic growth and job creation from these missions. In particular, I was proud to hear of the work the minister did in October in China to assist a phenomenal agency, Tourism Toronto. Could the minister please inform the House of his recent trip to China and the impacts it will have for Ontario?

Hon. Michael Chan: I want to thank the honourable member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore. Speaker, the member—

Applause.

Hon. Michael Chan: Oh, keep doing it, please.

The member is correct in the assessment of Tourism Toronto. I'm sure that the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport would also agree.

In October, I accompanied Tourism Toronto to China as they bid on and won the privilege of hosting what will be the largest travel delegation in Canadian history. Speaker, 6,000 of Nu Skin's most elite salespeople will visit Toronto in 2018. The delegation is expected to generate over \$8 million in tourist spending during their visit. The visit will clearly provide great benefits to Toronto's economy. I would like to congratulate Tourism Toronto on this fantastic achievement.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: Mr. Speaker, this is incredible news to hear, and I'm sure everyone in the House will join me in applauding the work of Tourism Toronto and congratulate the minister on his assistance with the bid.

In addition to this success with Tourism Toronto, the minister will join the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs on a trade mission to India in just over a week. As the House may recall, the minister joined the Premier earlier this year on a trade mission to India, which was a tremendous success.

I know that India is a rapidly growing market and one of the largest economies in the world. It's obvious that forging strong economic, trade and investment relationships with India could be beneficial to our province. Speaker, through you to the minister: What is the focus of the upcoming mission to India, and how will it benefit Ontarians?

Hon. Michael Chan: I want to thank the honourable member one more time for his question.

The Premier's mission in India in February of this year was indeed a huge success. We witnessed the signing of 65 new agreements valued at over \$240 million and expected to create more than 150 high-value jobs in Ontario. We hope to build on that success for this mission by focusing on a key sector in a priority market: agri-food.

Ontario's ag goods are highly sought after, and this mission can help our ag food industry expand internationally. As Minister of International Trade, I will continue to work to identify key markets with opportunities for Ontario businesses, and I look forward to doing so in India.

ANSWERS TO WRITTEN QUESTIONS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Huron—Bruce on a point of order.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I do have a point of order. I understand and realize that the government has been distracted, but they still have a job to do. Unfortunately, there are six order paper questions that have not been answered—three from the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change, one from the Ministry of Education, one from the Ministry of Labour and one from the Ministry of Energy. I would appreciate those answers.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Although the preamble wasn't appreciated, that is a point of order and you are allowed to ask that question.

I would turn to the government House leader for a response.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: We will pursue this and make sure that they are tabled in a timely manner. Thank you.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Ottawa South on a point of order.

Mr. John Fraser: I'd like to correct my record. I think that in introductions, I said "the Ontario chiropractors' association." What I meant to say was "the Ontario Chiropractic Association," and they are in room 228 right now.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Durham on a point of order.

Mr. Granville Anderson: I would like to introduce a delegation from the African Unity 6 Region Canada, led by Mr. Ahmed El-Basheer. I would like to extend a very warm welcome to them at Queen's Park. Welcome.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We welcome our guests.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I do have some news for all my colleagues. This is the last day for our pages. I would offer them our gratitude and thanks for the wonderful work that they did.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): A good group.

There are no deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1140 to 1300.

OPPOSITION DAY MOTION

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): A point of order from the government House leader.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you, Speaker. I rise on a point of order of great importance. Yesterday, the leader of the official opposition tabled an opposition day motion addressed to the Premier. I humbly submit to you that the motion is out of order for the following reasons:

Firstly, the motion is factually incorrect. Ms. Sorbara has not been the Premier's deputy chief of staff since October 3. This is a plain and clear fact, and the opposition's use of the term is entirely untrue. Its use in this form seeks to mislead the House to advance partisan goals.

In its entirety, the motion is a flagrant—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm sorry to interrupt, but you still cannot use terms that are unparliamentary. I'd ask you to withdraw.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I withdraw, Speaker.

In its entirety, the motion is a flagrant disregard for the sub judice rule of this House. Standing order 23(g) states that it is out of order when a member,

"Refers to any matter that is the subject of a proceeding,

"(i) that is pending in a court or before a judge for judicial determination; or

"(ii) that is before any quasi-judicial body constituted by the House or by or under the authority of an act of the Legislature,

"where it is shown to the satisfaction of the Speaker that further reference would create a real and substantial danger of prejudice to the proceeding."

Speaker, I submit that the motion is abundantly clear and should be to your satisfaction to create real and substantial prejudice to the proceeding for the following reason:

The motion tabled by the leader of the official opposition references specific evidence. Any such evidence—should it exist—may be squarely under the consideration of the courts, should it be found to be admissible as evidence. Evidence is foundational to any case, and both the crown and the defence will seek to address it in furthering their positions.

Voting on possible evidence in the Assembly will taint that evidence. There is no question of this.

Political votes and political judgments on what could be evidence are entirely prejudicial to the right to a fair trial, the presumption of innocence, and to the administration of justice at large. This kind of posturing is a complete disregard for the justice system and is fundamentally a real and substantial prejudice.

There are also two clauses in this motion that are entirely inappropriate and also render this motion out of order:

(1) Calling on the Premier, or any member of the House, to comment directly on the substance of charges laid against an individual is a direct violation of standing

order 23(h), which bars members from making allegations of wrongdoing.

The direct accusation is that the Premier was materially involved in an ongoing matter before the courts. The Premier has been forthcoming with Ontarians about the process and calling on everyone to show respect for the process. It is our submission that it is out of order under standing order 23(h) to allege wrongdoing on the part of any MPP.

(2) The motion calls on an honourable member to circumvent the justice system in the House and vote on exactly what the court will investigate. This is a complete disregard of the division of powers between the legislative and judicial branches in our constitutional democracy.

The motion wants to create a court of justice within the assembly and for members to vote on information of possible evidentiary value. The sub judice rule makes the role of the court paramount in its ability to apply and uphold the laws and Constitution of the country. This is an unprecedented attempt at violating the constitutional order in our province.

Entirely, Speaker, this motion violates standing order 23(g), even in its most liberal and generous of interpretations. The matter is before the courts.

The matters the Leader of the Opposition raises in the motion are the direct questions before the courts of this province.

These are matters that are clearly and obviously about evidence, and it is strictly the role of the courts to weigh evidence as triers of fact and law.

Finally, there is real and substantial prejudice to the cases before the court should the House engage in any, let alone lengthy, debate on the evidence either the crown or the defence may pursue before they are given their moment in court. This motion goes one step further and is making the House vote on the actual substance of the case.

The overarching principle of justice violated by the opposition leader's motion is that justice must be done and be seen to be done. While there may be those who believe our impartial justices to be immune from political pressure, there is also the very important matter of sustaining public confidence in the judicial system.

Political interference with the characterization of evidence rids the justice system of its independence and integrity in the eyes of Ontarians, who the justice system is there to protect.

The opposition has been attempting to interfere with evidence all week. Now they want the House to actually vote and pass judgment on evidence that will be before the courts soon. This greatly advances the real and substantial prejudice against the judicial system and the right of the accused to have a presumption of innocence.

Speaker Peters ruled that a Speaker is best in the position to rule on a matter raising the sub judice rule after the remarks have been made. He also said that, "The Speaker will exercise his discretion with respect to the convention only in exceptional circumstances, when it is

absolutely clear that doing otherwise would unfairly influence a judicial proceeding."

Speaker, the motion is in black and white on the order paper. This is an exceptional and egregious motion. It speaks directly to charges laid against individuals. It speaks directly to questions of evidence that will be directly addressed by the court—and it does so to taint the evidence. It makes allegations of wrongdoing against an elected member of the assembly.

All of these matters prejudice any admissibility of evidence. The motion's direct and partisan attack on a case before the courts brings the administration of justice into disrepute.

Therefore, Speaker, I ask that you exercise your discretion in finding this motion to be a real and substantial prejudice to the proceeding, and find the motion to be out of order pursuant to standing orders 23(g) and (h).

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I believe on the same point of order, the member from Simcoe-Grey and the official opposition House leader.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Of course we're caught off guard by this protestation this afternoon. We just had a House leaders' and not a word was mentioned of this.

The only point that I would agree with—although he's lawyered up over there, so I'll have to review exactly what he did say—is that we did make an error, perhaps, in saying "the Premier's deputy chief of staff." We could add the word "former" if he wants an amendment. At the time the charges were laid, I understand she wasn't the deputy chief of staff any longer but CEO of the Liberal Party and chief campaign manager.

Other than that, nice try, I'd say to the House leader. There's nothing in here where we have to hide behind privilege. It's very consistent with the questions that we've asked all week, so we'd have to null and void what we've already done. It quotes directly from those involved.

I say to the House leader, you can do what you've been doing all week in this House and not respond, which I suspect you will do. But everything in this—as far as we're concerned, it's our right to ask these questions. It's the government's right to sit on their hands when it comes to a vote, if that's what they want to do.

We're in unprecedented times. I appreciate the fact that you've allowed most of our questions this week. I would just submit that this is right along with what we've been doing all week.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further comment?

Mr. John Vanthof: I was also caught somewhat by surprise. I, on behalf of the party, would not agree with every statement in this opposition day. I think some of it could be worded differently, and perhaps could be re-submitted. But the thrust of the question is what the House is seized with at the current time, and I think the thrust of the question should be considered.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I appreciate hearing what the concerns are on the point of order. I will set that aside and report back to the House in a timely fashion, with some thought put behind my response. I

would offer an opportunity, as we always do, that if there are submissions to provide, then they can be provided as well.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

TOWN OF COLLINGWOOD

Mr. Jim Wilson: It's a real honour for me to stand in the House today and talk about a wonderful recognition that was recently awarded to the town of Collingwood in my riding of Simcoe–Grey.

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Mr. Speaker, on October 17, 2016, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, CFIB, announced that Collingwood leads its list of the top 10 most entrepreneurial communities in the country. CFIB's director of provincial affairs, Julie Kwiecinski, stated, "CFIB congratulates these municipalities for their tremendous leadership in helping to create the right environment for entrepreneurs to succeed."

CFIB's top 10 most entrepreneurial communities is a list that's part of the federation's 2016 Entrepreneurial Communities report. It's a great read. CFIB chief economist Ted Mallett said the report is "a great tool for communities and business owners to gauge what's working and what's not when it comes to laying the groundwork for entrepreneurial growth."

Collingwood is well-known for its many entrepreneurial businesses. As the member of provincial Parliament for Simcoe–Grey, I want to thank everyone involved with our local business community for their hard work, dedication and great customer service. The community is truly deserving of this recognition from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business.

LIVING WAGE WEEK

Mr. Percy Hatfield: This is international Living Wage Week. I'm standing here in the provincial Parliament today to brag about that. Why, you may ask. Well, because we have more employers in Windsor and Essex county paying a living wage than any place else in Ontario—more than 40. Some 7,700 employees are being paid at least a living wage in Windsor and Essex county, and that is something to be very proud of.

It hasn't been an easy journey, and it wouldn't have happened without the efforts of Pathway to Potential. P2P is funded by the city of Windsor and the county of Essex. They work to reduce and prevent poverty. My hat goes off to Adam Vasey and his staff at Pathway to Potential. They just convinced another 10 employers to sign on as a kickoff to international Living Wage Week.

Jeff Smith at Jeff Smith Chevrolet in Essex said, "We believe social justice and a living wage are two of the reasons we attract the very best in our industry."

Kelly Stack at Essex Community Services said, "We choose to pay a living wage to ensure our staff are happy, healthy and feel taken care of."

In our region, we define a living wage based on our cost of living as \$13.10 an hour with benefits and \$14.15 without benefits.

Speaker, as you know, we in the New Democratic Party have for a long time called for an Ontario minimum wage of at least \$15 an hour. We're going to keep up that fight, but in the meantime, we'd really like to see more regions in Ontario take up the living wage challenge.

HOLOCAUST EDUCATION WEEK

Mr. Arthur Potts: In the spirit of Remembrance Day, today I'm wearing my father's Legion tie. He was a veteran, Major General—sorry; Major General Arthur Potts was my grandfather—my father's Legion tie. Mr. Justice Joseph Potts. I'm a proud member of Branch 11 in my riding of Beaches–East York.

Today, Speaker, I want to speak about Holocaust Education Week. Beginning yesterday, we are now in the 36th annual Holocaust Education Week. This commemorative and educational week will run till November 9, culminating in the 78th anniversary of Kristallnacht, the Night of Broken Glass, which many consider to be the start of the Holocaust. This year's theme is "The Future of Memory" and will focus on new scholarship in Holocaust studies, including cultural and literary analysis, and providing an inquiry-based medium for new generations to hear the first-hand account of Holocaust survivors. Digital recordings, apps and interactive technologies are being utilized as part of a continuing legacy of remembrance.

This outstanding awareness week is planned and delivered by the Sarah and Chaim Neuberger Holocaust Education Centre, which runs year-round Holocaust education events and programs.

Over the next six days, a variety of panels and workshops, survivor testimonials and exhibits will be provided and are open to the public.

As every year the atrocities of the Holocaust and the Second World War fall further into the past, we unfortunately lose more and more of the voices of those who experienced this genocide. This makes initiatives like Holocaust Education Week vitally important to ensuring that their experiences and the history of this dark time are not forgotten.

I hope my fellow MPPs will also offer their support and help promote this meaningful undertaking in improving and preserving Holocaust remembrance.

ONTARIO CHIROPRACTIC ASSOCIATION

Mr. Bill Walker: It is my pleasure to rise on behalf of the Ontario PC Party and my constituents to welcome representatives from the Ontario Chiropractic Association who have joined us at the Legislature today, and to reiterate our support to them and their patients.

The association is some 3,000 strong, representing practising chiropractors in every riding across the province and who collectively deliver care to over 1.2 million Ontarians.

It may be of interest to share with the House that as many as 75% of our population, including many of my constituents in Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, receive complementary and alternative medicine as part of their overall health program, including chiropractic care. This includes assessment, diagnosis, treatment and hands-on preventive care for conditions related to the muscular, nervous and skeletal systems.

OCA members are committed health care professionals who go above and beyond to keep residents in their communities healthy and help them rehabilitate after falls and injuries. Two such doctors are Dr. Dennis Yurkiw and Dr. Lynda Montgomery in Owen Sound. Their daughter, Larisa Yurkiw, is a stellar example of the amazing work our chiropractors do. Despite suffering a severe knee injury that sidelined her for two seasons, Larisa recovered from her injuries and proudly represented us at the Olympics. She is also a ranked top 10 skier in the world.

I encourage members to personally welcome the chiropractors from their ridings by attending the reception that the Ontario Chiropractic Association is hosting today in room 228 until 2 p.m.

HOTEL INDUSTRY

Mr. Paul Miller: Hotels are an important part of the physical infrastructure that sustains a regional tourism industry, and they also have major economic benefits. A large supply of mid-scale downtown hotel rooms allows a city to compete internationally for large conferences and conventions.

Right now, the downtown Toronto hotel industry is under serious threat. The hot housing market has generated immense economic pressure to convert existing hotels into condominiums. There are redevelopment applications for five hotels in downtown Toronto, and three have recently closed. Over 3,000 rooms are under threat of disappearing from Toronto's hotel stock. Eliminating thousands of downtown hotel rooms would severely damage Toronto's ability to be competitive in the conference and convention market.

Furthermore, most hotels in downtown Toronto are unionized. Unionized hotel workers have spent years transforming their jobs from precarious work into stable jobs that pay living wages and have decent benefits and pensions. This group of workers has been one of the most effective at eliminating precarious work in this sector. They are a real Ontario success story. If these hotels close, these stable jobs will likely never be replaced. The workers at these hotels contribute to the tax base of all three levels of government.

What will the government of Ontario do to protect the hotel supply that is vital to the success of our largest city's tourism industry?

DIWALI AND BANDI CHHOR DIVAS

Ms. Harinder Malhi: I'd like to begin by wishing all of my friends here in the Legislature today a happy Diwali and a happy Bandi Chhor Divas.

This past weekend was packed with many events throughout the city of Brampton. It was a great feeling to celebrate Diwali with family and friends. Diwali is an important time of year to the Sikh, Hindu and Jain communities in Ontario and across the world.

Bandi Chhor Divas is the celebration by the Sikh community of the release of Guru Amar Das Ji from the Mughal regime and has become the second-most-important celebrated religious holiday after Vaisakhi, which is in April.

Along with spending time with family and friends at home, I was able to attend a number of events in my riding and ended the weekend by celebrating Bandi Chhor Divas with the community of the Guru Nanak Mission gurdwara in my riding of Brampton-Springdale.

The celebrations throughout the week were fun-packed, with sweets, diyas, lights, and children enjoying themselves with fireworks. Once again, I want to wish the entire community that celebrated over this past weekend a happy Diwali and a happy Bandi Chhor Divas.

COMMUNITY LIVING DUFFERIN QPAC

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I recently met with Barb Squirrel, who is rightfully proud of her work at the local sheltered workshop, QPAC, operated by Community Living Dufferin. She presented me with a great argument as to why it's important this sheltered workshop remain open. She also provided me with a petition calling on the government to halt the closure of the facility that has been signed by over 300 individuals. I'd like to share some excerpts of that petition with you:

"The Ministry of Community and Social Services has said all sheltered workshops will be closed.

"What we want is to not have our sheltered workshop QPAC shut down.

"We are happy to work at Community Living Dufferin in QPAC.

"Some of us do not want to work in the community, if you close QPAC you are taking away our comfort zone where we feel safe and our way of making money.

"Some of us have been hurt trying to work in the community so we want to stay in QPAC where we are safe and sound....

"Some people say we don't make enough money in QPAC but why should we make more so you can take it away.

"In QPAC we have lots of different jobs that come in.

"QPAC is a safe place to work for people with developmental disabilities where there is no discrimination and no one uses the 'r' word.

"Please do not close QPAC our sheltered workshop."

Speaker, that's a pretty powerful argument.

In a letter to Barb, the minister said she is not immediately closing the sheltered workshops.

The local Community Living boards should be making the final decision on whether sheltered workshops are part of the services they provide to their clients. I agree.

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JAMIE HIGH

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I rise today to congratulate London Free Press reporter Randy Richmond on his eight-part series “Indiscernible,” the story of Jamie High, and also to thank the editors who gave Mr. Richmond the two years it took to write Jamie’s story.

Jamie High died on December 23, 2014, after being found unresponsive in a segregation cell at the Elgin-Middlesex Detention Centre. Unlike Adam Capay, Jamie’s stay in segregation was brief. Like Adam, however, he was left shattered and incoherent by the experience. The title of the series refers to the 26 times that Jamie’s words could not be deciphered by the court reporter hours before his death—his responses noted in the transcript as “indiscernible.”

Jamie High fell victim to the gaping holes in Ontario’s mental health, justice and corrections systems, systems that consistently fail those struggling with addictions and mental health.

“Indiscernible” provides a thoughtful, critical analysis of complex issues, uncovering a map of problems that the London Free Press is planning to follow for years. In an age of citizen journalists and hobby bloggers, this kind of comprehensive and in-depth coverage, backed by editorial fact-checking and review, shows the value and ongoing relevance of traditional print media.

I congratulate the London Free Press and also reporter Randy Richmond on this very vital series.

KOREAN CANADIAN COMMUNITY

Mr. Yvan Baker: A couple of weeks ago, I had the pleasure of joining my colleague David Zimmer, the MPP for Willowdale, at the Korean Canadian Cultural Association’s inaugural fundraising gala, commemorating their 50th anniversary. The Korean Canadian Cultural Association has played an important role in strengthening the community, representing it and amplifying its contributions for 50 years. I was so pleased to join the Korean Canadian community in celebrating its 50th anniversary.

For decades, Korean Canadians have thrived in Canada as they have contributed immensely to our province. It is important to recognize the great social, political, economic and cultural influences that the Korean Canadian community has had and continues to have on Ontario.

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations, Korea and Canada have developed strong ties, and I am proud that our government not only recognizes those ties but also honours them. An excellent example of this,

Speaker, is the fact that Premier Wynne will be heading out on a business mission to South Korea in a few short weeks. Premier Wynne will be the first Premier to have visited Korea in the last 30 years.

I am proud that in my riding of Etobicoke Centre, we have a strong, growing and vibrant Korean Canadian community—one that I have worked hard to work with, learn from and represent. The community’s contributions to Etobicoke are numerous as well. Their history and culture continue to provide my community with irreplaceable diversity, while their commitment to family and to hard work is second to none.

I’d like to congratulate the Korean Canadian Cultural Association on their 50 years of leadership and successes. Thank you for helping to build a stronger community, a stronger Ontario and a stronger Canada. Kamsah hamnida.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Windsor–Tecumseh on a point of order.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Thank you, Speaker. With your indulgence, on a point of order: As you know, this is Ontario chiropractic lobby day. My favourite chiropractor from Windsor–Tecumseh, Dr. Madeline Crnec, has driven up this morning. I’d like to welcome her to Queen’s Park this afternoon.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

PUTTING CONSUMERS FIRST ACT (CONSUMER PROTECTION STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT), 2016

LOI DE 2016 DONNANT LA PRIORITÉ AUX CONSOMMATEURS (MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LA PROTECTION DU CONSOMMATEUR)

Madame Lalonde moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 59, An Act to enact a new Act with respect to home inspections and to amend various Acts with respect to financial services and consumer protection / Projet de loi 59, Loi édictant une nouvelle loi concernant les inspections immobilières et modifiant diverses lois concernant les services financiers et la protection du consommateur.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Agreed? Agreed.
First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

L’hon. Marie-France Lalonde: La protection des consommateurs à la maison et sur le marché est une priorité pour notre gouvernement. C’est pourquoi je suis fière de déposer ce projet de loi qui, si adopté, introduit

une nouvelle loi concernant les inspections immobilières et modifie diverses lois concernant les services financiers et la protection du consommateur.

This bill is part of our government initiative to increase consumer protection. The bill, if passed, amends a number of acts and enacts a new act in relation to door-to-door sales, home inspections and alternative financial services.

MOTIONS

COMMITTEE SITTINGS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Citizenship and Immigration on a motion.

Hon. Laura Albanese: I think I'm rising as deputy House leader in this case, Mr. Speaker. I am seeking unanimous consent to move a motion without notice regarding additional meeting times for the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly and the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The minister is seeking unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice. Do we agree? Agreed.

Minister.

Hon. Laura Albanese: I move that the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly be authorized to meet from 9 a.m. to 10:15 a.m. on Monday, November 14, and Monday, November 21, 2016, for the purpose of public hearings on Bill 41, An Act to amend various Acts in the interests of patient-centred care; and

That the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs be authorized to meet during the winter adjournment for up to seven days to conduct the 2017 pre-budget consultations and for up to three days for report writing.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): A copy of the motion, please. Madame Albanese moves that the Standing Committee—

Interjection: Dispense.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Dispense? Dispense.

Do we agree? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

PETITIONS

HYDRO RATES

Mr. John Yakabuski: I have a petition signed by literally hundreds of people in my riding of Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke and sent to me from newspaper advertisements.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas electricity rates have risen by more than 300% since the current government took office; and

"Whereas over half of Ontarians' power bills are regulatory and delivery charges and the global adjustment; and

"Whereas the global adjustment is a tangible measure of how much Ontario must overpay for unneeded wind and solar power, and the cost of offloading excess power to our neighbours at a loss; and

"Whereas the market rate for electricity, according to IESO data, has been less than three cents per kilowatt hour to date in 2016, yet the government's lack of responsible science-based planning has not allowed these reductions to be passed on to Ontarians, resulting in electrical bills several times more than that amount; and

"Whereas the implementation of cap-and-trade will drive the cost of electricity even higher and deny Ontarians the option to choose affordable natural gas heating; and

"Whereas more and more Ontarians are being forced to cut down on essential expenses such as food and medicines in order to pay their increasingly unaffordable electricity bills; and

"Whereas the ill-conceived energy policies of this government that ignored the advice of independent experts and government agencies, such as the Ontario Energy Board (OEB) and the independent electrical system operator IESO, and are not based on science have resulted in Ontarians' electricity costs rising, despite lower natural gas costs and increased energy conservation in the province;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To take immediate steps to reduce the total cost of electricity paid for by Ontarians, including costs associated with power consumed, the global adjustment, delivery charges, administrative charges, tax and any other charges added to Ontarians' energy bills."

Speaker, I support this petition, affix my name to it and send it to the table with—on his last day—page Nicolas.

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AUTISM TREATMENT

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas applied behaviour analysis (ABA) and intensive behavioural intervention (IBI) are the only recognized evidence-based practices known to treat autism spectrum disorder (ASD); and

"Whereas the combined number of children waiting for ABA and IBI therapies in Ontario is approximately 16,158; and

"Whereas estimates from the Ministry of Children and Youth Services for 2015-2016 indicate that only five more children are receiving IBI this year compared to last year and, shockingly, the number of children receiving ABA has dropped by almost 1,000 in the past two years—despite the fact that the wait-list is growing; and

"Whereas it is well known that early detection and early intervention is crucially important for children with ASD to learn to their fullest potential, and these programs set the stage for growth and development throughout children's lives; and

"Whereas some families are being forced to remortgage houses or move to other provinces while other families have no option but to go without essential therapy; and

"Whereas the Premier and her government should not be balancing the budget on the backs of kids with ASD and their families;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the government of Ontario immediately end the chronic wait-lists for IBI/ABA services for kids with autism spectrum disorder."

I couldn't agree more. I'm going to sign it and give it to Bianca to be delivered to the table.

HYDRO RATES

Mrs. Julia Munro: My petition is addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas electricity rates have risen by more than 300% since the current Liberal government took office;

"Whereas over half of Ontarians' power bills are regulatory and delivery charges and the global adjustment;

"Whereas the global adjustment is a tangible measure of how much Ontario must overpay for unneeded wind and solar power, and the cost of offloading excess power to our neighbours at a loss;

"Whereas the market rate for electricity, according to IESO data, has been less than three cents per kilowatt hour to date in 2016, yet the Liberal government's lack of responsible science-based planning has not allowed these reductions to be passed on to Ontarians, resulting in electrical bills several times more than that amount;

"Whereas the implementation of cap-and-trade will drive the cost of electricity even higher and deny Ontarians the option to choose affordable natural gas heating;

"Whereas more and more Ontarians are being forced to cut down on essential expenses such as food and medicines in order to pay their increasingly unaffordable electricity bills;

"Whereas the ill-conceived energy policies of this Liberal government that ignored the advice of independent experts and government agencies, such as the Ontario Energy Board (OEB) and the independent electrical system operator (IESO), and are not based on science have resulted in Ontarians' electricity costs rising, despite lower natural gas costs and increased energy conservation in the province;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"To take immediate steps to reduce the total cost of electricity paid for by Ontarians, including costs associated with power consumed, the global adjustment, delivery charges, administrative charges, tax and any other charges added to Ontarians' energy bills."

Yes, I am in agreement. I have affixed my signature and give it to page Samantha.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I have a petition with signatures which were gathered by the London chapter of Hydro One Not for Sale, and I want to thank them for their efforts. It's to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas the provincial government is creating a privatization scheme that will lead to higher hydro rates, lower reliability, and hundreds of millions less for our schools, roads, and hospitals; and

"Whereas the privatization scheme will be particularly harmful to northern and First Nations communities; and

"Whereas the provincial government is creating this privatization scheme under a veil of secrecy that means Ontarians don't have a say on a change that will affect their lives dramatically; and

"Whereas it is not too late to cancel the scheme;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the province of Ontario immediately cancel its scheme to privatize Ontario's Hydro One."

I couldn't agree more. I will affix my signature and give it to page Yasmine to take to the table.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Sylvia Jones: This petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Ontario's growing and aging population is putting an increasing strain on our publicly funded health care system; and

"Whereas since February 2015, the Ontario government has made an almost 7% unilateral cut to physician services expenditures which cover all the care doctors provide to patients; and

"Whereas the decisions Ontario makes today will impact patients' access to quality care in the years to come and these cuts will threaten access to the quality, patient-focused care Ontarians need and expect;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care return to the table with Ontario's doctors and work together through mediation-arbitration to reach a fair deal that protects the quality, patient-focused care Ontario's families deserve."

I support this petition, affix my name to it and give to page Do En to take to the table.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Mr. Michael Mantha: "Privatizing Hydro One: Another Wrong Choice."

A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas once you privatize hydro, there's no return; and

"We'll lose billions in reliable annual revenues for schools and hospitals; and

"We'll lose our biggest economic asset and control over our energy future; and

"We'll pay higher and higher hydro bills just like what's happened elsewhere;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To stop the sale of Hydro One and make sure Ontario families benefit from owning Hydro One now and for generations to come."

I wholeheartedly agree with this petition and present it to page Surya to bring down to the Clerk's table.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: I have a petition with over 1,200 signatures to submit to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas providing essential health care services is crucial to all the residents of Scarborough and across Ontario; and

"Whereas \$815-million cuts from physician services were made in 2015 alone; and

"Whereas \$50-million cuts have been made to physiotherapy services for seniors; and

"Whereas the decisions Ontario makes today will impact patients' access to quality care in the years to come and these cuts will threaten access to the quality, patient-focused care the people of Scarborough and all Ontarians need and expect;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"(1) Reverse the cuts to health care;

"(2) Grant binding arbitration to the OMA (Ontario Medical Association) so that we can reach a fair physician services agreement;

"(3) Work with all front-line health care provider groups to develop plans to create a sustainable health care system for the people of Scarborough and all of Ontario."

I'd like to give that to page Kepler. You can deliver it to the Clerk.

DENTAL CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Madame Elizabeth Cousineau from Hanmer in my riding for signing this petition. It goes as follows:

"Whereas thousands of Ontarians live with pain and infection because they cannot afford dental care;

"Whereas the promised ... dental fund under the Poverty Reduction Strategy excluded impoverished adults;

"Whereas the program was designed with rigid criteria so that most of the people in need do not qualify; and

"Whereas desperately needed dental care money went unspent and was diverted to other areas even though people are still suffering without access to dental care;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"To do all in its power to stop the dental fund from being diverted to support other programs; and

"To fully utilize the commissioned funding to provide dental care to those in need."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask my good page Olivier to bring it to the Clerk.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Ted Arnott: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas the price of electricity has skyrocketed under the Ontario Liberal government;

"Whereas ever-higher hydro bills are a huge concern for everyone in the province, especially seniors and others on fixed incomes, who can't afford to pay more;

"Whereas Ontario's businesses say high electricity costs are making them uncompetitive, and have contributed to the loss of hundreds of thousands of manufacturing jobs;

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"Whereas the recent Auditor General's report found Ontarians overpaid for electricity by \$37 billion over the past eight years and estimates that we will overpay by an additional \$133 billion over the next 18 years if nothing changes;

"Whereas the cancellation of the Oakville and Mississauga gas plants costing \$1.1 billion, feed-in tariff (FIT) contracts with wind and solar companies, the sale of surplus energy to neighbouring jurisdictions at a loss, the debt retirement charge, the global adjustment and smart meters that haven't met their conservation targets have all put upward pressure on hydro bills;

"Whereas the sale of 60% of Hydro One is opposed by a majority of Ontarians and will likely only lead to even higher hydro bills;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To listen to Ontarians, reverse course on the Liberal government's current hydro policies and take immediate steps to stabilize hydro bills."

I agree with this petition and I have affixed my signature to it as well.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas provincial underfunding for the Toronto District School Board is estimated to exceed \$109 million this school year;

"Whereas education development charges are fees levied against developers of new residential units and used by school boards to fund growth-related education land costs;

"Whereas school boards operating below capacity are not eligible to collect education development charges and EDC revenues may only be used for the purchase and upgrading of new land;

"Whereas the TDSB urgently needs more funds to finance infrastructure requirements to accommodate new growth, and developers should be contributing to these costs;

"Whereas the TDSB could generate nearly \$300 million in EDC revenues to support essential infrastructure needs;

"Whereas the requirements of the current legislation do not allow the Toronto District School Board to collect education development charges;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the members of the Legislative Assembly amend the Education Act to allow all school boards to access education development charges revenues and to enable school boards to apply EDC funds to school capital and site-related costs."

I agree, am signing it and am giving it to Yasmine to be delivered to the table.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Mrs. Gila Martow: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the provincial government is creating a privatization scheme that will lead to higher hydro rates, lower reliability, and hundreds of millions less for our schools, roads, and hospitals; and

"Whereas the privatization scheme will be particularly harmful to northern and First Nations communities; and

"Whereas the provincial government is creating this privatization scheme under a veil of secrecy that means Ontarians don't have a say on a change that will affect their lives dramatically; and

"Whereas it is not too late to cancel the scheme;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the province of Ontario immediately cancel its scheme to privatize Ontario's Hydro One."

I support this petition and I'm giving it to page Nicolas.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The time for petitions has expired.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

CHILDREN'S LAW REFORM AMENDMENT ACT (RELATIONSHIP WITH GRANDPARENTS), 2016 LOI DE 2016 MODIFIANT LA LOI PORTANT RÉFORME DU DROIT DE L'ENFANCE (RELATION AVEC LES GRANDS-PARENTS)

Mr. Mantha moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 34, An Act to amend the Children's Law Reform Act with respect to the relationship between a child and the child's grandparents / *Projet de loi 34, Loi modifiant la Loi portant réforme du droit de l'enfance en ce qui concerne la relation entre un enfant et ses grands-parents.*

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Let me set the tone for you, Madam Speaker. Let me take this Halls out of my mouth because I've been battling a cold for a very long time.

So let's imagine: Imagine that you are a grandparent. Imagine that one day everything is fine. Then you make an innocuous comment like "your child has a cute pixie nose," or you show too much excitement at the hospital when the twins are born, or you refuse to go to the same church as your daughter-in-law. You are asked to leave your son's house—thrown out like yesterday's trash. Imagine your world upside down. You are not allowed to go to your children's home; you are not allowed to call or email or phone. You apologize repeatedly, but to no avail. Anyone who tries to intercede on your behalf gets the same treatment. Most of all, your grandchildren are not allowed to see you, call you or FaceTime you at all.

Imagine, now: Your son or your daughter has just alienated you. It's wilful, it's spiteful and it's punitive. You can't really imagine what that feels like and the sheer emptiness of it happening to you. Imagine not hearing from your child and not seeing your grandchildren, and thinking the grandchildren must feel that you have abandoned them—not knowing what exactly you did or not knowing how to fix it. You feel guilt, you feel shame, and that's all you can feel and you can't tell anyone. What would they think of you or what would they think of your son or daughter, describing the situation?

Even seeing total strangers with their children reinforces what is absent in your life. You don't go out anymore. There's no joy in your life. You think of your grandchildren first thing in the morning and the last thing at night, and all day long. You feel a bit like a leper, so different from everyone else. You can't understand how your wonderful son or daughter, with whom you were so close, suddenly doesn't want you in their life anymore. Speaker, it's like a living bereavement.

This is a story that is repeated every day in Ontario. It can happen to you, and there is nothing in the act to protect you. The issue of grandparents who are denied access to their grandchildren by their sons or daughters happens in every community, every nationality and every religion. It happens in cities and small towns across this province. It leaves grandchildren and their grandparents to suffer quietly, defenselessly and, most importantly, in shame. Notwithstanding that it is deemed to be abusive by various organizations, it still continues.

Some people assume that these issues arise out of divorce, but this is not necessarily the case for most. Sometimes the root cause is found in sibling jealousy over money, over disputes, people innocently speaking

out of turn or sons and daughters exercising their control. Most often, it just occurs with seemingly no logic, no reason—and it's happening.

That's what a lot of people that I'm going to be introducing are challenged with. I want to introduce you to a wonderful group of people who we have with us in our gallery here today. We have individuals from Alienated Grandparents Anonymous: from the Toronto chapter, Mrs. Rivka Zelin; from the Ottawa chapter, Lea Clarke. We have, from Cangrands National Kinship Support, headquartered out of Belleville, Betty Cornelius here with us; Hugh McMaster from Grandparents Rights in Ontario, headquartered out of Cornwall; and we have many grandparents from Ottawa, Barrie, Oshawa and many other cities across the province here with us today, and others watching from home.

I want to thank Frank and Sonia Cianciullot and Wanda Davies for joining me this morning. How we articulated, I believe, with our media event this morning is the key to how we can get the rest of Ontarians to understand this real problem that we have across this province, and we need to address it.

This bill may sound familiar to you, Madam Speaker, as it was introduced about five times, if not six—this is the sixth time—previously by former colleagues. This is far too many times for this important piece of legislation to have slipped through the cracks or not have been made law by now.

1350

The intent of this bill is to legislate a consideration for the family courts to grant grandparents access to their grandchildren as part of a custody hearing. Here's the key, Madam Speaker: if it's in the best interests of the child.

This bill is not just about grandparents; it's about the children and grandparents wanting what's best for them. Not only do I want to recognize Mr. Craitor, a former MPP, and Christine Elliott, who was also here at one time; I also want to acknowledge my colleague the MPP for Parkdale-High Park, who has been a champion on these issues for many, many years—for their long-standing commitment and work on this bill in the past.

Just to reiterate: What this bill does is amend the Children's Law Reform Act to allow the development or continuation of a relationship between grandparents and their grandchildren.

Many of these children have already gone through so much stress and change in their lives. People often take for granted the relationship between a grandparent and their grandchild or grandchildren. No one expects that something like this could happen, but it does—way too often, Madam Speaker. Young children dealing with broken homes, fights between parents and changes in routine. Oftentimes, children's grandparents are the constant in their lives, a place where they can find peace and refuge during really, really tough, turbulent times.

Unfortunately for many grandparents, due to unfortunate breakdowns of the family, they are prohibited from seeing their grandchildren. I can imagine how sad this

must be for so many to lose contact with their loved ones. This makes no sense whatsoever, Speaker. Children need love, especially in these difficult times, and often that can come from grandparents—from *mémère*, from *pépère*.

Many of these grandparents are more than just grandparents; they are mentors. They can provide much-needed guidance for our children.

Many of these children lack stability in their lives. Often, these grandparents can provide them with that stability.

It's extremely sad that more than 75,000 grandparents in Ontario are denied access or visitation or even seeing their grandchildren. It's estimated that over 112,000 grandchildren are suffering from the loss of contact with grandma and grandpa.

These bonds are extremely important and will inevitably affect children for years and generations to come.

This bill currently exists in other provinces. It exists in Yukon, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Quebec and Nova Scotia. It's long overdue in Ontario.

I don't understand—

Interruption.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I need to remind our guests: We welcome our guests but you are not allowed to participate in any part of the debate.

I return to the member from Algoma-Manitoulin.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I thank the Speaker for reminding our guests. I'm sure she's going to remind herself that I'm going to get some extra time at the end of my speech.

I don't understand how we have put this bill forward so many times and it has not gone through. This bill is simple. It states that when a grandparent makes an application to the courts to have the right to have access to their grandchildren and to have the right to custody—or, in some rare cases, they could actually get full custody of their grandchildren. This bill would give direction to the courts—just direction—because it would add the word “grandparents” in the Children's Law Reform Act, where it does not currently exist.

There is still a responsibility when the grandparent makes a presentation or an application to still prove that it is always in the best interests of the child. The child will always come first, under this act.

I am sure that many people here in this House—many of my colleagues who are here are grandparents—I can imagine the pain and anguish you would feel if you were all of a sudden no longer able to be in the lives of your cherished grandchildren.

I feel, and many others feel, that we need to look at grandparents and their roles in their grandchildren's lives. If that relationship is deemed by the courts to be in the best interests of the child, we need to look at these options—or at least have the ability to look at these options.

Grandparents do so much work that, often, our governments are failing on. Oftentimes, my parents have helped out my in-laws, have helped out to care for my

children. It's a sad thing to think that many grandchildren and their grandparents have lost this bond.

I really do hope that this will be the last time that we introduce this bill. I hope that we will finally pass this important legislation once and for all. I plead with all of you: Don't let it sit on a shelf collecting dust; don't get into the politics of this. Let's make the right decision and put what could be in the best interests of children across this province—please vote, once and for all, for this bill. Make sure that it doesn't stay sitting on a shelf doing nothing. Let's pass this bill as quickly as we can.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Ms. Harinder Malhi: I want to thank the member for putting forward this important bill and I look forward to debating it in the House this afternoon. I think we all know that grandparents play a pivotal role in the lives of children.

From personal experience—I grew up with my maternal grandparents living right across the street, and I can say how important they were to me and how much they taught us. Coming from an immigrant family—they helped raise us because my parents were busy working to make ends meet. They were our first teachers. They showed us love, compassion, support, and they taught us about our culture and our roots—something that our parents may not have been able to do if they weren't there to support them.

Unfortunately, I lost my paternal grandparents well before I was born. My dad lost his parents very early. So we didn't have grandparents on both sides of the family, but I know that my maternal grandparents did everything they could to make up for it. I can remember the times that I spent with them, the things that they did for me, the first time that my grandmother walked me to school. That relationship holds a special, special place in my heart.

When my grandmother passed away, she was in India. I remember wanting to talk to her before she passed away, knowing she was at the end. I wished I could talk to her one last time. That happened. She did speak, but she stopped speaking thereafter. I wished I had just said, "I wish I could see her one last time," because maybe that would have happened.

That relationship is a special bond that you share, and nobody can take the place of grandparents in your lives.

So I look forward to supporting this bill today, and I look forward to it affecting children—especially children who may be struggling in their family situations, especially children who are facing separated families or single-parent homes. Grandparents can act as a support and build a strong foundation for their future. Coming from the school board, I also know how important it is for children to have stability in their lives. Grandparents can provide that stability when these children are going through struggles and rough times. It's important that we don't allow children to be alienated from their family members. Family members teach you about your roots, they teach you about your past, and they build character in children. They build a better person. They can give so much to the child and add so much to the child's life.

We often say—when I was at the school board, it actually almost became a cliché—that it takes a village to raise a child. If we don't have our own family there to raise a child, then where are we going to find the rest of the village? We have to work together. I think the adults need to put aside the differences that they may face. Life throws obstacles at you. It throws change at you. Circumstances may change in peoples' lives. But that doesn't mean we should let that impact the children's lives.

Just to provide some background to all the members, under Ontario's current law reform act, a grandparent already has the ability to obtain an order for access to their grandchild if it is found to be in the child's best interests. Under the current law, our courts must consider the love, affection and emotional ties between a child and any person who is applying for custody or access. This would likely include grandparents in any instance where the child's grandparents are an active part of the child's life. I want to stress that point, Madam Speaker. I understand that the member opposite would like to streamline this policy. I am supportive of any changes that would ensure the child's interests always comes first. It would be a shame if a loving and caring grandparent was not able to have access to the child. We want to ensure that in these cases we are facilitating this relationship, to continue to build support for the children of Ontario.

Once again, I want to thank the member for bringing this bill forward. I look forward to supporting it today, because I do understand the importance of having your grandparents in your life and having that stable foundation.

1400

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Steve Clark: It's an honour to speak to Bill 34, the Children's Law Reform Amendment Act (Relationship with Grandparents), 2016.

I don't have a lot of time this afternoon to speak to this bill, so I'm not going to get deep into the details, which the member for Algoma-Manitoulin has covered so very well. The bill, as we all know, recognizes that we must do more to ensure that grandparents can maintain a relationship with their grandchildren. Certainly, I understand the need to protect those relationships, and I'm pleased to support Bill 34.

There is no question that grandparents can have a tremendously positive role in raising any child. When family relationships break down, grandparents find themselves on the outside of the process. With no consideration from the courts, they can sometimes lose connection with those grandchildren forever.

I'm sure that all members of the House have met with grandparents suffering the heartbreak of losing touch with a grandchild in these circumstances. Last year, after a constituent shared her story with me, I wrote to the former Attorney General on her behalf. I asked if the government would consider bringing forward legislation like the one we're debating today. We all know a similar bill was passed unanimously at second reading in 2013. I

have to tell the House that I was very disappointed in the response that I received, which essentially said that the government was satisfied that our courts already provide enough protection. Clearly that isn't the case, or I wouldn't have been writing on behalf of my constituent in the first place, whose experience is shared by far, far too many grandparents across our province.

Of course, whenever you're talking about legal matters involving access to children, there are definitely complex issues involved. I appreciate that some concerns have been raised about the specifics of the bill. However, I happen to believe that, in principle, we should all support the bill. We should encourage the government to get it into committee and have that discussion.

I hope, as well, that the current Attorney General has an open mind. As I said, these stories of separation are heartbreaking for grandparents and for the children involved. We have an obligation to do what we can as legislators to make it possible to maintain those important relationships. I encourage all members to support this bill, and I encourage the government to move it forward after second reading.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I want to commend the member from Algoma-Manitoulin for bringing this bill back. As he said, this is the fifth time that it has been brought back. I was part of two iterations of this bill, along with former members Kim Craitor and Christine Elliott. I'm actually shocked that we're still debating it. Grandparents said this morning at the press conference that some of them have been coming here for seven years. This, of course, would make it another year if the government doesn't do it. They'd be back for an eighth year. This is unconscionable.

I, myself, grew up in a grandmother-centred household, quite frankly with parents who had a very troubled marriage and very troubled lives. When my grandmother died, I left home at 15 because it was impossible to live there without my grandmother. I certainly know how important grandparents are.

When I had my children, my daughter—my first-born—was born with severe colic. I don't think my husband and I slept for about six months of her life. My parents were dead; his parents were in Chicago. I would have given anything to have had grandparents. I cannot imagine why any parents anywhere would not want the support of grandparents.

Now, it has to be said, of course, that not all grandparents are wonderful grandparents—and neither does this bill. I think that's a very important point to make. It says specifically "if such contact would be appropriate in the circumstances." That's left up to courts to decide, as it should be. But we need this bill, because as you heard from other members, grandparents are not gaining access to their children without it.

My own sister-in-law, who lives in BC, is now going through exactly the same thing with her grandchildren—again, another province that does not have this protection

for grandparents. She has not seen her grandchildren in a year—and again, this is unconscionable—simply because of the whim of her daughter-in-law. How can we allow this? What we are doing, really, is denying our children the benefit of the wisdom and expertise and, most importantly, the love of other people in their lives—and the support for parents and the support for children. That's what we're doing here.

Again, I want to go back to the fact that this bill comes back and back again. It has been supported by all parties in this House. In fact, it originated as a Liberal bill all the way back in 2008, by the former member from Niagara Falls. Yet we're still here and still debating it. I cannot imagine for the life of me why that is so.

We just saw this week a tri-party bill pass within a week. Within a week, it passed first reading, second reading, third reading, unanimous consent, and it's law: Remembrance Week. It's hard to disagree with that. It's hard to disagree with this. This is a grandparent-and-apple-pie bill. This is the kind of bill that you're going to hear everybody around the House supporting.

So what I would ask of the government side is really just to come clean. What is their resistance to this? What we've heard—all we've heard—is, "Well, the courts are already capable of dealing with it." Clearly they are not, because if they were, we would not have these good grandparents coming back, year in, year out. We would not have had five iterations of the same bill. We would not be hearing stories like mine and stories from our constituents all the time, complaining that the courts are not granting them access to their children.

So please, government side, I would ask you, all of you: Put pressure on the corner office. We know how these things work. Make sure that the Premier understands the importance of this for grandparents everywhere across Ontario. Because it will be ultimately the Premier—your Premier, our Premier—who will be held accountable if this does not get to second reading and does not pass as law this year. As I'm sure the member from Algoma-Manitoulin will agree with me, we might give you until June, but certainly no longer than that. It has to go to committee, it has to come back and it has to become law before June, or, really, the rage of grandparents be upon you. And quite frankly, it already is.

So to our children who will suffer if this bill is not passed and the grandparents who are suffering because this bill has not been passed, I just say, keep up the pressure. You know who is the final decision-maker. It's Premier Kathleen Wynne. Let her know how you feel.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Thanks very much, Madam Speaker. It is great to be with you this afternoon. I do know that the good folks in the riding of Peterborough are adjusting their sets to channel 95 on Cogeco, which is following the proceedings here at Queen's Park this afternoon.

I want to thank the member, the hard-working MPP from Algoma-Manitoulin, for putting this bill forward this afternoon: Bill 34, Children's Law Reform Amend-

ment Act (Relationship with Grandparents). This is a very important private member's bill, and I think the previous set of remarks from my colleague indicated that the government side will be supporting this bill.

I'd like to kind of look at this perspective—and, first of all, I do know about the Raging Grannies. I've got quite a chapter of them in my great riding of Peterborough, a very distinguished group of grandmothers who do great work on a wide variety of causes. I think of Linda Slavin, really a wonderful, wonderful lady. She ran for mayor a couple of elections ago. She's part of the Raging Grannies group that's been doing a lot in my community of Peterborough with regard to climate change. Her husband, Alan, is a very distinguished professor at Trent University working in the climate change area.

But I want to put a bit of a perspective on this bill this afternoon.

1410

The opportunity—let's look at the farm. We have a set of grandparents that own, we'll say, for example, a dairy farm. We could say it is a dairy farm in the county of Peterborough or in the county of Wellington. What a great opportunity for grandkids to really get the opportunity to experience agriculture, by the grandfather and grandmother taking the grandchild out on a wonderful, warm, beautiful Sunday afternoon, perhaps in July and August, to see the real workings of a modern dairy farm.

This would be a farm, Madam Speaker, that would have all of the robots in place, the latest technology. I know you want to know, but on an iPhone today, you can actually track with modern technology—you could be anywhere in the world and you would know exactly how much feed that Flossie had on any given day. You would know how much milk that Flossie was delivering on any given day.

It would be a great opportunity for those grandkids, to get an opportunity to see how that works. The bulk of the population in Ontario today resides in urban centres. Those grandkids would get the opportunity to see what's happening on a family farm and to really appreciate that experience. That, Madam Speaker, would broaden the horizons of those grandchildren. I think that's pretty darn important, whether you're looking at a dairy operation or at a cash crop operation or a hog operation—perhaps taking the opportunity to get a chance to see that.

I think that's very important. That's why having grandparents have better access to their grandchildren is extremely important.

I do know, as a previous member said, that this bill has been in front of us on several occasions. The former member from Niagara Falls, I think, presented it on two occasions. I think there were some other members that brought this forward. I think it's important that we have this discussion this afternoon. I assume that all sides are going to support this, getting it on to the next stage. Hopefully, there will be a thorough discussion among House leaders to see what ultimately could happen with this bill to give grandparents greater access to their grandchildren.

I think this is a wonderful opportunity, and I look forward to hearing all sides this afternoon. But I just wanted to give that perspective of grandchildren getting the opportunity to be with their grandparents on all of the great farms. There are 52,000 family farms in the province of Ontario producing over 200 commodities. We have the most diverse agricultural province in Canada today, and I want to make sure that those grandkids get the opportunity to see those operations, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate? I recognize the member from York-Simcoe.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm sorry—I just got the visions of the minister's farms that children can take part in. But I really want to talk about how important I think grandparents are and how valid this initiative is.

We've heard several times now how many times it has come forward. Surely, there's enough times when you've been the bridesmaid; it's time to actually be the bride, and get the bill and move on.

I think that one of the things that attracts us to this is that most of us have had one or more grandparents. We've also had the opportunity to have the warmth and comfort and support and love of somebody, but they're not your parents. Sometimes that's a good thing, because sometimes grandparents seem a little more patient. They seem a little more interested in what you're doing, than maybe—parents appear not to have the time.

I think, in my own case, of a grandma who took me, the first time I went, to the Toronto symphony. It was something that was really very special, for me to be taken. Being able to be taken to things like that meant a great deal as a young child. The grandma always did things slightly different than your own mother. That was probably a good thing too, because you saw the benefits of slight variations, whether it was in having different food or the emphasis on cultural differences from one generation to another. But the most important thing that I think about this whole thing is that you have another important caregiver in your life, and children find the benefit of that. My sister's grandson comes to their house and asks for grandpa. He says, "Grandpa, come and play with me." People who have grandchildren have that opportunity to enjoy.

I think this initiative is one that is well deserved and should have already passed. It should be history by now, but certainly I take some pleasure in the fact that the member for Parkdale-High Park gave the government a bit of a timeline. Hopefully, we can see that.

But I do think that most people will be able to tell you about the fond memories and the security of another set of caregivers who had your back.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: It is an honour for me to rise today to speak to Bill 34, An Act to amend the Children's Law Reform Act with respect to the relationship between a child and the child's grandparents. I really want to commend the member for Algoma-Manitoulin, my

colleague in the NDP caucus, for his persistence in trying to finally get these amendments passed that would provide courts with the option of considering grandparents as part of the family compact when there are decisions to be made about custody and access.

As has been pointed out by the other members who have spoken to the bill, this is the fifth time that we are here in the Legislature having this debate over a period of eight years. I think we have heard all sides of this issue during those five periods of debate, and as the member reinforced so strongly, it really is time now to move this forward and get these changes made.

I was a newly elected MPP when the member brought this private member's bill forward in the last session of the Legislature. We heard strong support expressed by MPPs from all parties for this bill, but like many other important bills that we discussed during that session, many other bills that passed second reading with unanimous support, his bill died on the order paper when the Legislature was prorogued—which brings us to today, when we are going through the debate once again, talking about an issue that we know has the support of MPPs. We know it has the support of grandparents. We know it has the support of parents. We know it has the support of advocates of children's welfare. We also know that the government has consistently refused to take this issue and bring it forward as it should.

As the member has pointed out, there are an estimated 75,000 grandparents in this province who have been denied the ability to visit their grandchildren, to see their grandchildren, to maintain that strong emotional connection with their grandchildren. That means that there are over 100,000 grandchildren who are also denied that emotional bond that they had enjoyed with their grandparents.

This legislation would give courts the legal authority, the legal ability, to consider the merits of individual cases and determine whether to grant access on the basis of whether contact would be appropriate in the circumstances. As has been pointed out several times already, this is a critical piece of the legislation. We know that being a grandparent does not automatically mean that one is a capable or loving adult or a positive force in a child's life, so there have to be protections in the bill to ensure that the children's best interests are paramount. There certainly will be good and valid reasons, in some cases, why grandparents should be denied access. That's why the bill is written the way it is.

1420

We also know that contact with a loving, caring grandparent is often in the best interests of the child. It is particularly important at a time when family breakdown has occurred, when children's lives are being turned upside down, when they worry about who will love them in the case of marital separation. Grandparents can provide that kind of constancy and reassurance to a child that is absolutely critical to enable that child to deal with the chaos that is unfolding in their world.

Earlier this year, I met with one of my constituents, Joanne Doxtator. She shared with me her struggle that

she had been going through to stay in contact with her grandchildren. Her son had obtained a court order giving him visitation rights in 2009, but despite prearranging visits, the estranged wife often cancelled the visits or arbitrarily cut them short. Joanne was caught in this situation where she was unable to see her grandchildren.

When I met with her, the last time she had seen them was in August 2014 at her son's funeral. It was a time of great mourning, but she was overjoyed by this opportunity to finally reconnect with her grandchildren at the funeral, which was the last time she saw them for the next two years.

Fortunately, Joanne's story does have a happy ending. She told me that she was finally able to secure a court order granting her access after two years of complete separation from her grandchildren. But we know that many grandparents do not have the same outcome when they go to court to try to get that visitation maintained. Certainly, Alienated Grandparents Anonymous Ontario has shared many stories of judges saying, "There's nothing in the current legislation that directs that I should provide that access, so I'm not going to give you that opportunity."

That is the reason why this legislation is so important. The current laws do not provide that kind of legal clarity that judges need in order to rule on these questions of visitation and access. Children need their grandparents, grandparents need the contact with their grandchildren, and we collectively need to move forward and make sure that this bill becomes law.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have to say that when I came in this afternoon, I thought to myself, "Well, my week is largely done. I've had my last speaking part." Within the span of five minutes, I discovered that I'm going to be speaking to all three measures here this afternoon.

This one I'm particularly glad to speak to. I certainly thank my colleague from Algoma-Manitoulin for taking a measure that I have spoken to before and heard about in great detail before. For most of the first 10 years of the time that I was elected, my seatmate was the former member from Niagara Falls, Kim Craiton. Kim and I got to know each other very, very well. This was one of the pet projects that Mr. Craiton had been moving through the House, which is why I'm glad to see that someone who in many ways is like Kim, my good friend Michael Mantha, has taken this measure up. It is an important measure.

I think I read more of Kim's petitions while Kim was sidelined with a bout of cancer than Kim did. In fact, he would often call me and say, "My constituents in the Falls are saying that I'm actually in Queen's Park because they can hear you reading the petitions about the grandparents." I said, "Well, I'm doing my best to contribute to it and to make sure that your constituents, while you're recovering from this bout of cancer, remember that, in fact, you're working on their behalf, even if you're not physically here."

Most of the things that I did want to say have, by and large, already been said, and said very well, by my colleagues on all sides. We all agree what a role grandparents play in a child's life. In my hometown of Montreal, just about six weeks ago, I was visiting my grandmother's former house, which has changed hands a number of times. I met the gentleman who owns it now and pointed to what is still a plot of ground. I said, "I remember this growing up. This was my grandmother's garden." He said, "Garden? It's big enough to be a farm." I said, "Well, that's where she came from."

Of course, all of us, as we go forward in our lives, carry with us a very essential piece, not so much of our parents, because our parents are the people who live with us all the time, but our grandparents, who are very, very special people, perhaps because, in their view of a more perfect world, they spoil us rotten. I think this is part of the reason that this bill is important. We've often heard that it takes an allegorical village to raise a child, but that village often includes the extended family and, most especially, the grandparents.

Good luck. Let's cross our fingers and hope that this time it gets through.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mrs. Gila Martow: I'm very pleased to rise and speak on Bill 34, put forward by the member from Algoma-Manitoulin of the NDP caucus, An Act to amend the Children's Law Reform Act with respect to the relationship between a child and the child's grandparents.

It's actually an interesting title for the bill, because it really is about relationships. Unfortunately, we're hearing that this is probably the sixth time, and it has been different parties that have put forward legislation to try to address the fact that many times, often after a divorce, but it could be other types of circumstances, grandparents are being shut out of their grandchildren's lives. The children are basically being used as pawns in many cases.

I just want to talk a little bit about somebody I had a long conversation with, named Wendy Margolis. Wendy lived in Thornhill for almost 25 years; she lives in Toronto now. She wants me to share her story, which is that in May 2015 her sister, Susan, passed away from breast cancer, leaving two children who are now a 5-year-old niece and a 12-year-old nephew. As Wendy puts it, someone she used to refer to as her brother-in-law—she obviously doesn't any longer, but in theory most of us would still consider, after a death in the family, the spouse to be part of our family. She is being shut out, as are her sister's friends and the rest of their family, of these children's lives; very limited access for maybe some family members, but basically they are being shut out.

It is heartbreaking because children don't stay children forever. Sometimes if you've lost valuable time with your grandchildren or we even hear of people—we see stories in the news of parental abduction and people who have lost 10 years of being a parent to their child. I don't

think anybody could relate to it, because I couldn't imagine not having access to my children. It was hard if they were even in summer camp and you're getting letters at the time and they're just a phone call or a drive away.

As we heard, there are 75,000 grandparents, it's estimated, in the province of Ontario who are shut out of their children's lives; I believe it's the province, not the country, but it's just as horrific numbers. I think there's a lot that can be done. When we talk to our constituents or we meet people at events, they say, "What are you speaking on or what are you working on?" or they go on Facebook and they'll watch us speaking on social media. These are the kinds of bills where they're so surprised. They think, "Well, why does it have to take so long?"

Why does it have to be presented so many times and just left to die on the order paper or when governments prorogue? We have to start over again for that reason. Why can't things be done efficiently and quickly so that we can ensure, as other provinces have done, that courts, in terms of divorce or in terms of any kind of custody hearing, take into account the grandparents in the children's lives?

Now, we know that some grandparents may not deserve to be in their children's lives, but we all know that far and wide the vast, vast majority of children are better off with grandparents in their lives than without grandparents in their lives.

1430

There have even been studies done to show the positive impact on the child's life, obviously on the grandparents' lives and on society at large, in terms of physical health and mental health as well.

I want to mention the group Alienated Grandparents Anonymous—AGA. They have a website. If anybody is listening at home or on social media, go to www.aga-fl.org. They're in over 15 countries and 50 states. It's a fantastic network, not just to become an activist—although obviously they would like that—but so that you can have support. I think a lot of the time when people are faced with this kind of difficulty, it can be embarrassing. How do you say to your friends and neighbours, "My children or my son-in-law won't let me see my grandchildren"? How do you say that? It's embarrassing, because you're worried that people are thinking, "Well, you must have done something or you must have said something to deserve this." So people stay quiet.

We all know that suffering in silence and by yourself is lonely and miserable, but it also can adversely affect your health, your well-being and your quality of life and therefore the quality of life of everybody you're living with and working with and interacting with. So I really stress that people get involved with AGA, the Alienated Grandparents Anonymous group, and see what they're working on. They have a fantastic website. It explains a lot of what they're working on to ensure that children aren't being used as pawns to punish the grandparents.

Nobody has quite mentioned why grandparents would be punished. We've heard a few different reasons, but I

bet that a lot of it has to do, unfortunately, with money. They have a friend whose parents are being generous and they think that their parents should be equally generous—that kind of thing. It's horrific to even imagine. As somebody who grew up with my grandparents living across the street, who called my mother if I went out without a hat in the winter or was double-riding my bike with my sister, it's hard for me to imagine not having your grandparents in your life.

I really urge everyone here to support this. I look forward to finding out from the grandparents who are here today that this has had a positive impact.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I return to the member from Algoma-Manitoulin to wrap up.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I want to thank the members from Leeds-Grenville, Parkdale-High Park, York-Simcoe, London West, Mississauga-Streetsville and Thornhill.

To the member from Brampton-Springdale: Get informed. Go see the AGA's website. That's the problem: You're not doing your homework as far as finding out what the challenges are.

To the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs: Thank you for participating in the debate. Your last two words from your comments were "great bill." You could have ended at that. The rest of it sounded like a product that comes out of a farm, and we needed a shovel for it.

There's one thing I want to stress to this House: I've heard discussions and support. Thank you for having the discussions. We've been having them for eight years. We've had your support for eight years. Go into action. Do something about this. You have the mandate. You have the power to do it. Stop giving us your support and your discussions; go into action and get something actually accomplished so that we can have those nurturing relationships and those loving relationships that grandparents want with their kids.

Essentially, this is giving a consideration to the courts in order to give a decision that is in the best interests of those children. If you don't know why you're not doing this, find out. Reach out to AGA. Reach out to the grandparents in your ridings and find out why we are not moving this forward.

To all the grandparents who joined us here today, I've got a message for you: Look at all the empty seats in here. We've got a lot of work to do, and you have a lot of work to do as well. Find out why your MPP was not in this House for this debate. Find out why they weren't in here—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Okay. The member has to withdraw. You cannot incite. You need to withdraw.

Hon. Michael Chan: Where's your leader? Where's your deputy leader?

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Order. I have asked the member to withdraw.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I didn't name anybody, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): You cannot incite.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I withdraw.

We've got a lot of work to do.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): We will vote on this item at the end of private members' public business.

HINDU HERITAGE MONTH ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LE MOIS DU PATRIMOINE HINDOU

Mr. Dickson moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 56, An Act to proclaim the month of November Hindu Heritage Month / Projet de loi 56, Loi proclamant le mois de novembre Mois du patrimoine hindou.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Joe Dickson: Namaste. I'm honoured to stand here today and debate private member's bill number 56, Hindu Heritage Month Act, 2016, proclaiming November in each year to be Hindu Heritage Month.

The first Hindu immigrants began arriving in Canada at the beginning of the 20th century. Now Ontario is home to more than 36,000 Hindus, who enrich the diverse landscape of Ontario.

Among the—

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: It's 360,000.

Mr. Joe Dickson: Dr. Shafiq corrected me, and I will bow to his seniority.

Among the existing religions, Hinduism is one of the most ancient, enduring today as a healthy, spirited and colourful group of traditions. Hinduism draws its life force from tradition and heritage, and remains more an open culture than a fixed code of conduct. Hinduism is a way of life—one that is open, non-violent, inclusive and tolerant. It is a family of many diverse traditions, each with its own distinction, theology, philosophy, rituals, code of practices and value system. Hinduism teaches humanity, equality and unity in diversity.

Hindu Canadians from across Ontario have made significant contributions across all fields: science, education, medicine, law, politics, business, culture and sports. Hindu Heritage Month in Ontario will recognize those important contributions that Hindu Canadians have made to Ontario. It will allow us, as Ontarians, to celebrate Hindu communities and the people who have helped to build our province into the greatest place to live, work and raise families. We are all so very proud of the achievements of our Hindu community, and how they have helped each other and enriched our province.

Of course, one of the most famous Hindus was Mahatma Gandhi, who became the prominent leader of the independence movement. The Congress party was there. He sought to improve the welfare of women and the lowest-caste members of Indian society. We have

examples of that here in Ontario and Canada with our Premier and with our Prime Minister.

A famous quote of Mahatma Gandhi's sums up Hinduism for me and what I have experienced with those Hindus whom I have come to know: "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in service of others." I believe that this means only through the service of others can we truly care for one another. Embracing inclusiveness through action is truly caring. This is what Hindus strive for in their lives: service of others. I can relate to this. Like many of us here in this special, hallowed room have devoted their life—as virtually we all have. I, as the oldest of 10 children, learned very fast in life that everyone helps everyone else. That's why we're all here today.

One of the earlier established Hindu temples is on Yonge Street in Richmond Hill: the Vishnu Mandir Hindu temple. This temple is very special in that it houses the Canadian Museum of Indian Civilization, provides global outreach programs, and has a seniors' home on-site, as well as a Montessori school, a music and arts academy and a women's club.

More and more temples are being built to provide a place of worship to the large and vibrant Hindu community, and to enrich the Canadian and Ontarian landscapes. Another good example of this is the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Toronto, which also houses a heritage museum.

1440

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: Etobicoke North.

Mr. Joe Dickson: I thank the good doctor again.

I'm honoured to have two temples in my riding of Ajax-Pickering: the Devi Mandir in Pickering, on Brock Road, which is in north Pickering, and the Sankat Mochan Hanuman Mandir and Cultural Centre in south Ajax. I was honoured to know the former spiritual leader of the Devi Mandir, Pandit Damodar Sharma Ji, and the former president, Amarnath Binda. The beautiful Devi Mandir is undergoing restructuring, and I'm very excited, as others are, that a new board and spiritual leader will be forthcoming.

Today in the gallery is the director of operations of the Devi Mandir, Mary Rampersad, and her two daughters, Samantha and Sabrina. Premier Wynne visited the Devi Mandir on a very special day in August 2014. I remember that, six months prior to that, the good people at Devi said to me, "We would like to have the Premier as our guest for our 25th anniversary." I said, "Give me a special note addressed to the Premier. I will personally deliver it to her." My colleague MPP MacCharles was very active with me on that as well.

The Sankat Mochan Hanuman Mandir and Cultural Centre in Ajax, on Westney Road, is the other temple in my riding. It is very young and it is very vibrant. The chairman and spiritual leader is Pandit Rabindranath Tiwari. I fondly call him Pandit Rudy. Pandit Rudy is here today as my special guest and a member of the gallery with his wife and the president of Sankat, Debra Tiwari.

My good friend Cecil Ramnauth is a very important member of the temple and a known leader in Ajax's

community. I'm honoured to have him here with me. He is a past Ontario and Ajax Senior of the Year Award winner, and he also holds a Lifetime Achievement Award from the city of Pickering and the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal. He's here today in the gallery on this very auspicious occasion.

One of my very good personal friends, Dinesh Kumar, is in another area, attempting to get here later on. He is a typical proud Canadian and believes that all life is sacred, to be loved and revered and therefore is proactive in ahimsa: non-injury in thought, word and deed. He will be with us.

There are a number of significant festivals celebrated by Hindus, including Diwali, also celebrated by Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists and the population at large. Deepavali, or Diwali, as I call it, is the biggest of all celebratory festivals that members of the Hindu community celebrate. It falls either in November or October each year, depending on the cycle of the moon. It is observed on the 15th day of Kartik, the holiest month of the Hindu lunar calendar. Diwali commemorates the victory of good over evil. In addition, during this time of the year, Hindus also celebrate other significant festivals such as Navratri and Durga Puja.

Diwali spiritually signifies the victory of light over darkness, good over evil, knowledge over ignorance and hope over despair.

I was honoured to celebrate Diwali in Pickering at the Devi Mandir just a couple of days back, on October 22.

I also celebrated Diwali with Premier Kathleen Wynne and a lot of members of my caucus who are here today. Minister Damerla, Minister Naidoo-Harris, MPP Vic Dhillon, MPP Harinder Malhi and MPP Shafiq Qaadri, the good doctor from Etobicoke, were all at the Woodbine banquet facility. Of course, the Premier was our guest speaker. She was eloquent and very dynamic, as she is every evening. I want to acknowledge everyone from the Liberal caucus, led by the Premier—to make Diwali such a special occasion for us.

I provided a letter of warm wishes on October 25 to the Bangladesh Hindu Community Centre in Canada on the occasion of their celebration of Diwali in MPP Lorenzo Berardinetti's Scarborough Southwest riding. That went out to their congregation.

This Saturday, I will be celebrating Diwali again in my riding of Ajax-Pickering with Pandit Rudy; my friend Cecil Ramnauth; and Sankat Mochan Hanuman Mandir and Cultural Centre at J. Clarke Richardson, which is a gigantic secondary school.

Other significant Hindu festivals are Navratri, Durga Puja and Ganesh Chaturthi. I have attended in my riding every year the Ganesh Chaturthi, the immersion celebration of spiritual cleansing yielding wisdom, prosperity and good fortune, in the Pickering Beach area, which is at Lake Ontario. In fact, this past Sunday September 11, 2016, I attended the Sankat's fifth annual Ganesh Visarjan at the lake. There was a tremendous amount of response from the community there to share that special day.

I'm quite proud that in the last few years a site was designated by the shoreline in the city of Pickering as an ash-scattering site to serve the Hindu and broader community that has cremation as their last rite and as part of their culture. The Ontario government offered unused crown lands in Pickering for Hindus to scatter the ashes, and it has worked out extremely well.

I'm very honoured, as I commence to close some of these comments, that November will be that special month each year: Hindu Heritage Month, as it will be known. The province of Ontario is providing an opportunity to recognize the important contributions that Hindu Canadians here in this country have made to Ontario's socio-economic, political and cultural fabric. Hindu Heritage Month will give occasion to remember, celebrate and educate future generations about Hindu Canadians and the important role that they have played to date, and continue to play, in communities across Ontario.

I'm honoured to have colleagues in the Liberal caucus here—you will probably look at them and recognize most of them; a lot of them represent all of the communities that are here with us today.

And I'm so honoured personally that you are here. I take a great deal of pride in telling you that our Premier, Kathleen Wynne, has been very instrumental in this process. Without her and without all of our colleagues, we would not be here today.

Speaking on some of my bills as they come, I would be remiss if I didn't mention the two people sitting beside me, Amrit Mangat and the good doctor Shafiq Qaadri.

Ladies and gentlemen, to each and every one I say thank you. I'm honoured that you're here with us.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate.

Mr. Patrick Brown: It is an honour to stand today in support of the Hindu Heritage Month Act. I want to commend the MPP for Ajax-Pickering on putting forward this thoughtful bill. I know many times here at Queen's Park we disagree on many issues that affect the direction of the province, but I think it is a beautiful day when there is no disagreement. There is no disagreement when it comes to the incredible contributions of the Hindu community in Canada.

Having this heritage month act honouring the contributions, I think, is a very thoughtful idea, and I commend the MPP for Ajax-Pickering. There is no monopoly on a good idea. A good idea was put forward by the MPP for Ajax-Pickering and I am proud to support it.

I have a long history with the Hindu community in Canada and in India. I've had the honour to go to India 16 times. I like to joke sometimes that I'm as comfortable in Baroda, Delhi or Mumbai as I am in Barrie, Toronto or Orillia.

I know we have many leaders today of the Hindu community who are with us for this celebration. I think today is an opportunity to mark the incredible benefits and the incredible contributions the Hindu community has made to our incredible province: that sense of work

ethic, that beautiful entrepreneurialism, the success we've seen in absolutely every field. We have seen leading members of the Hindu community achieve great success in the province of Ontario. I see it when I go to the Canada India Foundation galas, when I go to the ICCG galas. You see a celebration of success in absolutely every field. To have an opportunity for the Legislature, for the province of Ontario, to mark that success, I think, is a step in the right direction.

And it's not just business success. I have to say, the cultural infusion to Ontario has been beautiful to see. One of the side benefits of going to India 16 times and attending so many events with the community is that you see beautiful aspects of the culture. I can tell you I think I attend more Diwali parties and Garbas than I can count. We even had our first-ever Garba here at Queen's Park. The PC caucus hosted a Garba. I'm not a good dancer, but I can tell you some members of our caucus did attempt to learn how to do a proper Garba. I would love to have a kite festival at Queen's Park, but I think in January it would be a little too cold.

1450

Some of the beautiful cultural events we have seen with the Hindu community—seeing them celebrated in Ontario, I think, is special. And that's Canada. Canada is a multicultural mosaic. It defines us, it makes us stronger. To have acts like this that celebrate these particular contributions is something that we can all rally behind. That's why I wanted to come here myself, as leader of the party, to add my two cents that this is a positive step.

I salute it, I support it, and to everyone from the various organizations that have come to watch this unique moment when all three political parties join together, I thank you for being here to share in this moment today.

Madam Speaker, I wanted to say that I've really enjoyed my visits to India to such a point that when I kept on going back and back and back, the former Chief Minister of Gujarat started calling me Patrick Bhai. I take that with a piece of honour because it's about friendship. I know all of us in this Legislature share that very profound friendship with the Hindu community.

We say thank you for making Ontario even stronger, thank you for making Ontario even greater.

I look forward to celebrating Hindu Heritage Month every year in Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am very proud to rise today in this House to speak on behalf of the Ontario NDP caucus and also the people that I represent in my riding of London West, and to express our full support for Bill 56, An Act to proclaim the month of November Hindu Heritage Month. I also want to commend the member from Ajax-Pickering for bringing this important bill forward.

One of the things that I love the most—and I'm sure that love is shared by all of us in this place—about this province that we live in and our own communities is the incredible multicultural mosaic that we are able to enjoy

and benefit from on a daily basis. I love the value that Ontarians place on inclusion, on diversity, on not just tolerance but on the celebration of the richness and vibrancy that the many cultures that make up our province bring to our communities; the acknowledgement, the recognition that we give to the contributions that different peoples have made across many fields of endeavour, from science and education to medicine, law, business, politics, culture and sport.

We are at a time right now when we are watching our neighbours south of the border talking about building walls and excluding religious minorities from taking part as citizens, which makes us, as Canadians and as Ontarians, hold our heads just a little bit higher as we think about our own commitment to welcoming newcomers, to recognizing cultural diversity as an asset and as a strength that contributes to the wonderful nature of our economic, social and cultural fabric. We also pride ourselves on the refuge and support that we have provided to those fleeing war and persecution.

For all these reasons, New Democrats are supporting this bill. We agree with the member from Ajax-Pickering that it is vital to recognize and celebrate the contributions of Hindu Canadians to our province. I want to thank the member for giving me this opportunity to speak about this bill, because in the process of preparing for my speech I had the opportunity to learn more about these wonderful contributions and the rich history that Indo-Canadians bring to our province.

The Hindu Canadian community here in Ontario is thriving. There is no better example of that vibrancy than the architectural beauty of Hindu temples that are located throughout our province—with more than 50 Hindu temples in the GTA alone.

In particular, I want to highlight the beauty of the BAPS Shri Swaminaryan Mandir here in Toronto, which will be celebrating its 10-year anniversary in 2017. That Hindu temple was constructed following guidelines from ancient Hindu scripture. It's made of 24,000 hand-carved pieces of marble, limestone and Indian pink stone, set together in a traditional Indian architectural style. It's an absolutely stunning building, and it speaks directly to the contributions that Hindu Ontarians and other Indo-Canadians have made to this province.

I also point to the beauty of the Hindu art that we have had the joy of viewing and appreciating. I recently read a blog from the Royal Ontario Museum that described a remarkable painting that is in their collection just up the street here on University Avenue. The piece is a portrayal of lovers. It features Radha and her lover Krishna, who in Hindu mythology is often considered to be an incarnation of the deity Vishnu. The colours and the rich details of the painting offer valuable lessons to viewers on Hindu representations of gender and fluidity. These are just two examples—this painting and the temple—of the many significant contributions that Hindu Ontarians have made to the economic, cultural and social vitality of the province.

In my own community of London, there is a small but vibrant Hindu Ontarian community. The Hindu Cultural

Centre of London was founded in 1971 by a group of eight students who were attending Western University. This dedicated group of Hindu Ontarians met and held services in the student lounge basement of Somerville House on campus, but 20 years later, by 1990, the group had grown large enough in number to work together to open a physical space in London. The mandir was opened in time for Diwali that year. It was constructed with the goal of accommodating 400 people in the prayer hall.

To this day, the Hindu Cultural Centre of London continues to contribute immensely to the culture and the opportunities that Londoners have to learn more about Hindu Ontarians who live in our area. This cultural centre offers more than just a gathering place; it also provides dance lessons, heritage courses and traditional music lessons to Hindu Ontarian youth.

Speaker, I come from a background in education, and I understand the importance of teaching, making people aware of all of these incredible contributions as a way to break down barriers, as a way to push back against ignorance, prejudice and hate. That's why bills like this, creating a heritage month, are so important. It's an opportunity for all of us—particularly young people, but all of us—to learn about, honour and celebrate the cultural traditions of other peoples who have come to this province, and to promote those values I talked about at the beginning: the values of inclusivity, community and respect that define us as Ontarians and Canadians.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Hon. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I am pleased to rise today and speak in favour of Bill 52, the Hindu Heritage Month Act. Put forward of course by my colleague the member from Ajax-Pickering, the bill would proclaim the month of November as Hindu Heritage Month.

Of course, I'd like to take a moment right now to welcome the members from the Hindu community who are here with us today. You know, Speaker, as I look over, I see so many old friends. Of course, there's Pandit Sharma, and there's Rajiv Katarey. The list goes on and on, but that's what this is all about: Recognizing our community and the community leaders who are here with us today. It is an honour to be here with them.

Applause.

1500

Hon. Indira Naidoo-Harris: Thank you.

I'm proud to say that there is a sizable Hindu population in my riding of Halton. In fact, just last weekend I was fortunate to join some of Halton's Hindu community for Diwali celebrations. Along with some of those celebrations—and there were several of them—I found myself at one point in a room filled with Naidoos. They were all there celebrating Diwali and they were all from Coimbatore. For the first time in my life, it was such an honour and a pleasure to be in a room of Naidoos right here in Canada and right here in my own riding.

The celebrations for Diwali, of course, stretched across my riding and across the province. As you all

know, they were wonderful, colourful and a real testament to the strength of this community.

As you may know, Diwali is also known as the festival of lights. It's a special time of year, a time when Hindus come together with family, friends and neighbours to celebrate what we value most in our lives: peace, love and understanding. As a child, in my family, that meant starting the day off by getting the diyas ready with my mom and then lighting those diyas; being in the kitchen with her as she prepared dinner; the evening ending with a wonderful family dinner, going outside and having the fireworks, and at some point jumping in the car and driving around the community to see all the other fireworks and all the diyas lit across the town and the city. It was a wonderful time of year.

Really, one of the most amazing things about these events and Diwali is seeing how open and inviting they are to everyone, especially when we go to a Diwali celebration in Ontario. It's a time to celebrate culture, friendship and tradition, but most importantly, it's an opportunity to share our culture and traditions with our friends and our neighbours. That is exactly what we would be doing by declaring November Hindu Heritage Month. By doing this, we all benefit. We all learn from each other and become one global family.

When I was in India with some of my colleagues here, I had the honour of carrying the wreath to the Gandhi memorial along with my colleague and my friend right here, MPP Dhillon. There was nothing that drove home to me more clearly the fact that we are a global family. Being in India, celebrating the great Mahatma Gandhi and remembering that he actually started his journey in his political life in South Africa as I did—and continuing that journey to India and then, of course, being a leader for peace and understanding around the world was something that was driven home to me on a very real and very personal level.

Here in Ontario, we are proud of our diversity. Our diversity is our strength. There are close to 500,000 Hindus in Canada, and a large majority of them live right here. In fact, Ontario's Hindu population is more than 365,000 people. This community is one of the threads that bind our multicultural tapestry.

Bill 52 would recognize the significant contributions made by the Hindu community in Ontario. So it is with great honour and with great pleasure that I'm pleased to say today that I support Bill 52 and that I hope all of my colleagues here in the Legislature will do the same.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm proud to rise this afternoon and speak in support of Bill 52, the Hindu Heritage Month Act, 2016. This may be strange from a member whose riding in eastern Ontario doesn't have a huge Hindu population, but the opportunity to speak in support of this bill and to encourage all MPPs to pass it is very personal to me.

Over the past 18 months, I have been honoured to represent our caucus and our leader, Patrick Brown, at a

number of Hindu events and festivals in the GTA, in Ottawa and elsewhere in the province. I can't say enough about how much I appreciate and thank these great Ontarians for opening the doors of their homes and their temples to me. More than opening doors, they've opened their hearts to welcome me. I want to thank you for that. In doing so, you've made me feel like a part of your community.

My words this afternoon in support of declaring November as Hindu Heritage Month are the least I can do to say thank you to my new friends in the Hindu community. We've heard why November is the appropriate month to recognize the amazing contribution that Ontario's 400,000-strong Hindu community has made to our wonderful province of Ontario. As we've heard, there are a number of important festivals central to the Hindu faith that take place in and around the month of November. These celebrations—I know my leader spoke about them earlier—are Navratri, Durga Puja and Diwali, the festival of lights.

As I said, I've been honoured to take part in these special celebrations and to learn more about the Hindu faith and the traditions that sustain it. It's been incredible to watch generations of Hindus come together to enjoy amazing food, music, dance and fellowship.

Now, I have to say, I've got the food-tasting down pretty well, but I still need to work on some of my dance steps. I'm sure my Hindu friends who have seen me dance can attest that I'm a lot better with the food than with the dancing.

I'm so very proud—and by proclaiming November Hindu Heritage Month, it will teach more Ontarians about this culture that does so much to enrich the multicultural fabric of our communities. We're proud, we're open and accepting in Ontario, and I'm just so pleased that this afternoon we're hearing about all-party support for this bill.

We must still look at every opportunity to further enhance our understanding and appreciation of our diversity.

I want to take this opportunity, in closing, to thank the member for Ajax–Pickering. You've given us one of those great opportunities, with Bill 52, to all come together and support this. I want to thank you and I want to thank our guests for being here.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Thank you to all from the Hindu community for coming out today. I'm certainly blessed in my community to have a Hindu temple. It's one of the oldest ones in Toronto. It's Hindu Prarthana Samaj.

Many of you know I'm a United Church minister. In the Christian tradition, we have something called confirmation. In the Protestant Christian tradition, that takes place at around 13, when young people decide they want to be Christians as adults. Before they did that, it was my practice to take them to visit other faiths so they understood a little bit of the world they live in, and we went to the temple.

I want to thank you, and I certainly want to thank the priest at that temple for giving me a lesson in theology. I have a doctorate in theology, but it's Christian theology. I want to thank you for a lesson there. The children saw the incredible statues in the temple. They said, "Why do you worship statues?" and the priest very patiently explained to them, "No, no. You worship someone called Jesus Christ." The kids said, "Yes." He said, "Is he not a manifestation of the divine?" The kids said, "Yes." "So are these representative of the manifestations of the divine." Namaste. Thank you for that. It was a wonderful lesson in theology for the children and for myself. I think often people don't understand and don't have a way in to another faith. That was mine.

My other way in, and I'm surprised nobody else has mentioned it, is yoga. Yoga is a Hindu spiritual practice as well, and I tend to do that—at least, I try to do it three or four times a week. The last two weeks have not been so good. Again, I don't think we recognize in the west how much Hinduism has imbued everything we do. If you've ever used the term "chakra," you're really looking to Hinduism as the root of all of that. Much of our alternative health practices come from Hinduism.

So thank you for all of that and thank you, of course, for Mahatma Gandhi. Again, you cannot walk into most Christian churches without hearing him quoted at some point—one of the great spiritual leaders for all faiths of the world.

I have two favourite Gandhi quotes that I use a great deal, and one of them is with children, and that is, "Be the change you wish to see in the world." That is a profoundly beautiful statement. The other one is a comment—again, a theology lesson—on bad Christian theology. Mahatma Gandhi said, "An eye for an eye just leaves the whole world blind." I've often used that, again, when we talk about Old Testament or Hebrew scriptures in our own scriptural tradition and the misunderstanding, the way it's been used so badly in the world.

1510

Thank you for that. Thank you for enriching all of our lives in Canada. Thank you for being here today. And of course, thanks to the member from Ajax-Pickering for bringing in this bill. It's a really important one. It's so important that he did that, and it's so important that we've had a chance to acknowledge the incredible gifts. You really have changed the west with Hinduism. We are all touched by it, whether we know it or not. It's about time we admitted it and it's about time we said thank you. Namaste. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Hon. Dipika Damerla: I'm pleased as well to add my voice in support of Bill 56, An Act to proclaim the month of November Hindu Heritage Month.

I'd like to begin by welcoming members of the Hindu Canadian community into the Legislature. As you can see, the support has been so overwhelming that we couldn't fit them on the Liberal side; we also had to fill

the opposition side. Then there was overflow, so we also have people in the public galleries. Thank you so much. All of this was possible because of you.

As you know, there's only about seven minutes and there are seven members of caucus who want to speak to this. Not only is there overwhelming support for Hindu Heritage Month from the community, but I just want the community to know that usually there are only two or three MPPs from each side who speak to a bill, but today we have seven people who wanted to speak to the bill—actually, a lot more than seven, but we had to cut it off at seven. That just tells you the great, across-the-board support that this bill has in the caucus. As a Hindu Canadian, I just want to thank all of you—my caucus members—as well as the overwhelming support on the opposition benches.

I particularly wanted to thank the member from Parkdale-High Park for some of her very true comments. She spoke to some of the things that I was going to say.

Finally, I just want to say that time is short. There are many of us who want to speak, so I'm going to limit my comments to say this: This month is really important as Hindu Heritage Month, and I'll tell you why. Growing up in India—as many of you know, I grew up in India—being a Hindu was not particularly unusual. Fast-forward: I moved to Canada 25 years ago and I very quickly realized that being a Hindu was viewed as something exotic, something different. I was a little dismayed and disappointed that my faith, which brought me so much comfort and was really my moral compass, was viewed as something exotic—well-meaning people, but it was just the stereotyping of the faith.

Of course, 25 years later much has changed. There's a much greater awareness of the Hindu faith, but I think being able to recognize Hindu Heritage Month in November will go a long way in explaining the faith that much more to the people of Ontario. Thank you so much.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mrs. Gila Martow: I'm very pleased to rise and speak on Bill 52, the Hindu Heritage Month Act, that was brought forward by the member from Ajax-Pickering.

It's kind of a fun time to see everybody come from the community. We're debating something that's interesting. We get to learn a lot sometimes. We think we know, but then we research to speak on these bills and we learn as we do the research and when we listen to everybody else talking.

I'll just say that the minister responsible for seniors affairs made it sound kind of negative to be exotic. I would just tell her that she is exotic; she's gorgeous. Let's celebrate all the goddesses today, Hindu and non-Hindu.

I want to mention Karen Hunter. She is a friend of mine who left on October 30 for Bhutan. She'll be there for about a week, and then she says she's going to Sikkim in India, which is a remote area in the Himalayas, for about three weeks. She's going to be living in a monastery where she'll be teaching English as a second

language to about 20 monks aged 12 to 18. She's expecting the monks to speak very little English initially, since they speak Nepalese mostly, and she's expecting them to improve quickly.

She arrived in Delhi on the first day of Diwali, and the celebrations were in full swing. She sent me an email. Even though she was in the airport, she wanted me to mention—I told her I was going to be speaking here today—that there were garlands all over the terminal, people wishing happy Diwali, bowls of chocolates and fireworks. And that was only at the airport, so that must have been pretty exciting.

I have a few notes here from a friend of mine in Thornhill, Laj Prasher, and I'm just going to read from them.

Ontario is a home to many hundreds of thousands of Hindus; notably, the Prasher family, of course, a Hindu family with over 100 members living in the province.

Laj couldn't make it down today, but I know he's going to be watching at home at some point.

His wife is Surinder, and he has two sons, two daughters-in-law and five grandchildren, all living in Thornhill for over 30 years. He came to Canada at 19 years of age with only \$6.40 in his pocket. That was 46 years ago, I believe. He brought with him deeply rooted and ancient, old spiritual values, such as Harinam, vegetarianism, yogic education, deity worship, sacrifice for others and helping the less fortunate. His family values are unity, peace and the idea of praying together and staying together.

The Prasher house has this om symbol outside their gates. I'm pretty sure a lot of people here know them. He says that he has had quite a few people ring his doorbell to ask him about the symbol. Most of them have been people of the Jewish faith, who are always very curious about other people's faiths and traditions—and what I didn't say to Laj is that they're also not shy. A lot of people would be curious, but they wouldn't necessarily ring your doorbell. They just want to know about the om symbol. He says that he's made a lot of friends in Thornhill—not just from having the om symbol, but he knows that it brings a lot of interest and happiness and peace and positive attitudes.

I've been at some of the festivals as well—as my colleague mentioned, that we've been to a lot of festivals. I've been to festivals with Laj, and I've even been to his house where he had sort of an event—it was also a birthday party for his granddaughter and it was a fundraiser for Peter Kent, the MP for Thornhill, and we had a lot of fun.

The Prasher family says that they're thankful to God and their father, Mr. Tarsem Lal Prasher, a visionary man who decided to send his children to this great province and this great country of Canada. The Prasher family is indebted to this great nation for its generosity, which gave them happiness and prosperity. I'm very happy to share this message from Laj and his family to all of us.

He has been involved in so many—the Canada India Business Council, the Canada India Foundation, the

Indo-Canada Ottawa Business Chamber, Canada-India Centre for Excellence and the IC-IMPACTS, as well as I'm sure numerous other festivals that he has helped plan.

Laj just wanted me to say that his family is thankful to all the MPPs for supporting this bill to declare the month of November as Hindu Heritage Month. He says—and I'm going to end with this—"God bless this province and this great nation."

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Miss Monique Taylor: It's really an honour and a privilege to be able to stand in this House and to celebrate different cultures and heritage. I have to say that one of the best parts of my job is just meeting so many different parts of my community and being welcomed into that community. I have the Hindu Samaj Temple in my riding of Hamilton Mountain, so I visit there often. I love the community. It's vibrant. The cultures, the colours and the food are always so fantastic.

I just had the pleasure of celebrating Diwali with many of the members of my community. The festival of lights says it all—when we can do better over evil and when we can all share in those cultures that make us better.

Bills like this will do better by the province of Ontario, and I'm happy to support it.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Bob Delaney: Namaste, namashkar, kem cho and sat sri akal to all of our guests.

Hinduism is very much a part of our Canadian social fabric. Hinduism is reflected in this Legislature, in the professions, in the arts, our businesses, our communities and on all of our continents. Like all of our members, I am so pleased to see so many of our faith leaders here and community leaders from all of our mandirs across the GTA, including Ram Mandir and BAPS Swaminarayan in Etobicoke and all of those who have come from our various communities.

There was some discussion about which month we would pick. I believe we have settled on November, but Hinduism is three millennia older than the Gregorian calendar from which we're picking that month, or even the Julian calendar which it replaced. I know we've landed on the right solution.

I know some of my colleagues would like to say a few things as well, so I'll leave them some time. Dhanyavaad, Speaker-ji.

1520

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Ms. Harinder Malhi: I'm pleased to stand up today to add my support to the Hindu Heritage Month bill. Being a member from Brampton, I want to say that we have a large Hindu community. I'm proud to stand by them, celebrate with them, support them and work with them, as we have for the last few years.

I'm a regular visitor to the Gurmandir, where a lot of my residents frequently visit. I'm happy to have you all

here, so welcome to the Legislature. Thank you for being here. I'm so pleased.

Hinduism is a way of life, a tolerant way of life, a non-violent way of life. As Ontarians, we follow the same values, and that's why it's so important that we recognize it. I'm proud to be living in a province where we can recognize diversity, celebrate diversity and learn about each other, learn about our cultures and share our cultures and our values not only with other residents, but with our children, so that they can grow up in a harmonious society and be knowledgeable about all the cultural diversity around them.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: Namaskaar, sat sri akal, vanakkam, kem cho, bonjour and welcome. Having the privilege of being the member of provincial Parliament for Etobicoke North, I have, I think, seven and possibly more Hindu mandirs or temples within my own riding. They are the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, the Toronto Hindu Dharmic Sabha, the Sringeri Vidya Bharati, the Sindhi Gurmandir temple, the Canada Shri Muththumaari Amman, the Pranav Hindu Mandir and the Shri Ram Sharnam.

It's a vibrant community. I'm constantly invited to functions, whether it's Holi, Diwali, Navratri or Durga Puja, and many, many more. We are honoured to celebrate you. You are us and we are you. Dhanyavaad.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Welcome to everyone here today. It's wonderful to see so many familiar friends and faces, whether you're from Scarborough, Durham or beyond. Welcome, all. Thanks for being here.

I want to especially thank my wonderful colleague from Ajax-Pickering for bringing this bill forward. When I got elected in 2011, it was Mr. Dickson who introduced me to the Devi Mandir in Pickering and other places of worship, and I'm very appreciative of that. He's an excellent MPP for the community and he has great relationships with all of you.

I want to also acknowledge someone else who's here. Sterling Lee from MP Holland's office is joining us today. Thank you, Sterling, for joining us.

Much has been said—all the wonderful things that have been said—about why this bill is important and why Hinduism is such a beautiful and wonderful religion and culture. I'll speak again to the Devi Mandir in Pickering. They're a very caring community, as I'm sure all the mandirs are. Of course, we have the walkathon that the mandir puts on in Pickering every year, and recently they paid a wonderful, wonderful tribute to late Pickering Councillor Rick Johnson. When we were up there for a Diwali event not that long ago, they honoured the late Rick Johnson and they honoured his wife. I thought that was very special and very indicative of the caring, community-minded nature of this organization.

Again, I'm very supportive of this act and so pleased that we're all on the same page. Thank you to all our guests. Namaste.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I return to the member from Ajax-Pickering to wrap up.

Mr. Joe Dickson: I acknowledge my colleague the Honourable Tracy MacCharles for referencing Sterling from Mark Holland's office. Mark Holland and I are in exactly the same riding, so we cover both provincially and federally. He is always very, very active with us.

I acknowledge my good friend MPP Amrit Mangat from Mississauga-Brampton South, who is my colleague sitting here, doing the paperwork today.

I wanted to say to each and every one of you, this is a special day that has been coming for about a year. I acknowledge all three parties for the great words they have put forward. Their spokespeople have been excellent.

The Premier of Ontario—it just wouldn't have happened unless she made it happen with us and her staff. I know a number of you have contacted and spoken to my staff, and I'm very thankful that you did that, because we can adjust things in a hurry.

We will never forget Bill 56, Hindu Heritage Month Act. This is just the beginning. I would like to acknowledge my colleagues and my friends from the opposition who were good enough to speak today, from London West, Simcoe North, Halton, Leeds-Grenville, Parkdale-High Park, Mississauga East-Cooksville, Thornhill, Hamilton Mountain, Mississauga-Streetsville, Brampton-Springdale, Etobicoke North and, of course, Pickering-Scarborough East. And I happen to be from the riding of Ajax-Pickering.

To each and every one of you, I look forward to the opportunity to say goodbye to you as we leave this chamber today. I will never forget you coming here this day.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Thank you. We will vote on this item at the end of private members' public business.

HUMAN RIGHTS CODE AMENDMENT ACT (GENETIC CHARACTERISTICS), 2016 LOI DE 2016 MODIFIANT LE CODE DES DROITS DE LA PERSONNE (CARACTÉRISTIQUES GÉNÉTIQUES)

Mr. Colle moved second reading of the following bill:
Bill 30, An Act to amend the Human Rights Code with respect to genetic characteristics / Projet de loi 30, Loi modifiant le Code des droits de la personne en ce qui a trait aux caractéristiques génétiques.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Mike Colle: Bill 30 is a bill that, if passed, would do a very important thing, and that is to ensure that your medical health information, or your family's medical health information, isn't used in a way that would perhaps cause you not to be employed, not obtain proper insurance or, in some cases, even be denied housing.

Because of the rapidly changing world of medical technology, there are now 30,000 genetic tests available to people—30,000, Madam Speaker. In 2012, just a couple of years ago, there were just about 2,000 genetic tests available, so there has been an explosion of this type of medical technology.

This explosion is a good thing, because with proper genetic testing, we can really improve personal health outcomes. But because there's no protection when you get genetic testing, many Canadians and Ontarians are not having the genetic tests done for their children, for themselves or for family members.

Doctors like Dr. Cohn at SickKids hospital are telling us that many parents are not doing genetic testing for their kids, and that genetic testing might help them in dealing with a disease or a disorder that that child may have. The test is not being done, therefore the treatment cannot be done to help that child. The parents aren't doing it because the parents are afraid that that genetic test information will be used against that child or the family in the future.

We are the only jurisdiction in the G7 countries, whether it's the European countries, the United States or the UK, where genetic discrimination is basically tolerated and allowed. There is no prohibition to essentially deny someone insurance or deny someone housing or proper employment because you did a health test.

1530

This Bill 30 is not only important for fair treatment from insurance companies or from employers, but it's critically important for improved health outcomes. In fact, a lot of this genetic testing information is so readily available. There's one website called 23andMe. You can go online and get genetic testing, and that company even sells its genetic information to whoever is the highest bidder. There's no protection against that information being used against you from, again, your basic rights to contract here in Ontario.

There's similar federal legislation before the House of Commons. I've worked closely over the years with Senator James Cowan from Nova Scotia, who spearheaded this bill through the federal Senate. It passed with all-party support through the federal Senate, and it is now before the House of Commons, in committee. MP Rob Oliphant has been spearheading Bill S-201 to have genetic discrimination outlawed across Canada.

The reason we have to do this provincially is because provincial jurisdiction is, justifiably, in the area of insurance and employment. Therefore we, as a province, and other provinces also, will have to enact legislation to ensure provincial laws protect their citizens from genetic discrimination. Ontario will hopefully be the leader in this so other provinces will follow because this is a new area of science, but it's a critically important area, as the researchers will tell you.

I certainly want to thank the advocates for this attempt to prohibit genetic discrimination. It started with Bev Heim-Myers and the Canadian Coalition for Genetic Fairness. They represent the Canadian Breast Cancer

Foundation, the Canadian Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, Canadian Organization for Rare Disorders, Muscular Dystrophy Canada, Huntington Society of Canada and Ovarian Cancer Canada. These are representing probably hundreds of thousands of Ontarians who want this protection so they can have better outcomes.

I also want to thank CIJA, the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs, who've joined the coalition. They are the advocacy arms of the UJA, United Jewish Appeal, which basically feels it's an important initiative to protect all communities against this kind of discrimination. They've joined in the coalition, and we had a telephone town hall the other night with my colleague Sylvia Jones, the member from Dufferin-Caledon. She's been very supportive and helpful, and she gets it that we need this kind of protection. We had a lot of very interesting conversations with people from across Ontario about the need for this kind of legislation. And so we have to step forward.

There were two very compelling articles in the Toronto Star and the Globe and Mail recently about this issue. There's a young man—like myself, he's getting on with some grey hair lately—Lorne Marin, whose father, Jay Marin, I knew, and who is a great advocate for finding the cure to blindness. Unfortunately, Lorne has one of these genetic disorders. Lorne wrote a beautiful article in the Toronto Star on September 22, where he basically pleaded with governments, he pleaded with the public, to please support this type of legislation.

The legislation, according to Lorne, is really needed to ensure that people in the future get the proper health care and are not discriminated against because they have blindness or their parents had cancer or Huntington's. Right now, you are basically punished because of your parents' DNA, and that DNA is now public information and is readily available. So I want to thank Lorne Marin for his incredible leadership in this area.

Also, there was a very powerful article by three scientists who are just down the street here: Dr. Yvonne Bombard, who is a researcher at St. Michael's Hospital, Dr. Ronald Cohn and also Stephen Scherer, who again implored for this type of legislation to come forth.

They say that "people decline genetic testing even when the results might guide their best-practice treatment" for fear of discrimination.

This is another very powerful statement that Dr. Cohn and Dr. Bombard made: "The genetic endowment you are born with was not your choice; being forced to take a genetic test to qualify for insurance conflicts with medical and ethical guidelines."

Another very powerful quote from the article in the Globe and Mail: "Genetic fairness is an intrinsic right, which can empower citizens to lead healthy and meaningful lives. It's time to protect the most fundamental essence of ourselves: our DNA."

We have the scientists, the doctors, and the medical community all agreeing that it's about time Ontario and Canada catch up to the rest of the modern world in ensuring that your medical information, which could be used for your benefit, is not in a perverse way used

against your rights for employment, housing and insurance.

We had a young physiotherapist who came, I think, from the London area. She came to us here and she talked about the fact that she tried to open up a business and applied for insurance for a business. Well, she was in essence denied insurance for her physiotherapy office because her father had Huntington's disease. Not only is the father punished with this very debilitating disease; the daughter is punished by not being able to earn a living because of a genetic disposition that's there. We know that through medical breakthroughs with genetic information coming forward as it is, there will be very pointed treatments that will help solve a lot of medical problems. But right now, there's a real impasse, and it's really deplorable that this type of medical information could be used against you.

That is why, as I said, the medical community and all these advocacy groups for people across the province are advocating this. The Canadian ovarian cancer society says there's a test right now, that if you can detect the mutant BRCA gene in women, if you can detect that gene and its mutations, you can actually save that woman's life. But because so many people are afraid to do that test for the BRCA gene mutation, women are dying.

We need to make sure that the law in Ontario catches up to the science. This is not just about a theoretical judicial process. This is about practical health and rights of all Ontarians, and it's about time we move forward to protect people from being discriminated against.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I'm pleased to rise in support of Bill 30. In fact, I co-sponsored it. I want to congratulate the member from Eglinton-Lawrence.

Four years ago, I met with the Huntington Society of Canada. They raised this issue with me, and it very much resonated. I was actually going to do a private member's bill on it, and the member from Eglinton-Lawrence, Mr. Colle, has introduced this type of legislation a number of times. So, in your generosity to allow me to co-sponsor, thank you very much.

As I said, the Huntington Society is the reason I learned about genetic discrimination. It's part of the Canadian Coalition for Genetic Fairness, which includes the ALS Society, the Alzheimer Society, the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation, the Canadian Congenital Heart Alliance, the Canadian Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, the Canadian Organization for Rare Disorders, Canadian PKU and Allied Disorders, the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs, the Foundation Fighting Blindness, the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada, Muscular Dystrophy Canada, Osteoporosis Canada, Ovarian Cancer Canada, Parkinson Canada, the Tourette Syndrome Foundation. Clearly, there are an awful lot of organizations and individuals who understand the importance of this issue. The coalition has been advocating for the need to establish safeguards against genetic discrimination for years.

1540

As we know, currently in Ontario, individuals who undergo a genetic test can be compelled by insurance companies and employers to disclose the results and may be denied employment or insurance because of the characteristics in their genes.

I want to reinforce this point: Just because you have a certain genetic characteristic that is tied to a disease does not necessarily mean you'll end up developing that disease. It is important that we quash this notion that if you have a certain genetic characteristic, you will 100% develop the disease. It's wrong.

As the Canadian Coalition for Genetic Fairness states: "It is unfair to use genetic information to determine which individuals will be employed or insured, especially when the assumptions underlying the use of genetic information by insurers and employers are often faulty, misleading and speculative. Genetic information is often misunderstood. Human genetics are multifactorial with a complex relationship between genes, environment and lifestyle resulting in considerable variation in outcomes between individuals."

Simply put, there is no guarantee that you will get a condition even if you find out that you have a certain genetic marker tied to it. There is more to it than just having the gene.

As we know, the member from Eglinton-Lawrence has previously tabled this legislation. When I learned about it, I spoke to him and said that I was very interested in supporting it. So thank you for allowing me to co-sponsor it and participate in the debate today. It's an important issue for all of us, not just for those who have certain genetic characteristics. It's about safeguarding everyone.

There is a proliferation of genetic tests out there now. There are approximately 33,485 tests, believe it or not, and that number continues to explode. Many of these tests are not done in a hospital, but rather are done through mailing in a sample to a company for analysis.

Often, individuals are not even aware of the consequences of getting a genetic test, such as being obliged to provide the results to an insurance company or an employer. I spoke to an individual recently who admitted that they underwent genetic testing and didn't know about the downside risks. This is exactly the reason why we need to have this legislation passed. The vast majority of people who get genetic testing done don't know the consequences. This can lead to having to pay a disproportionately higher insurance premium or an outright refusal.

The flip side, of course, is individuals who understand how doing a genetic test can impact them and, out of fear, refuse to get the test. A recent poll was taken that showed only 5% of those who understand the consequences, as the law is currently written, would get a genetic test. Once understood, there is a fear of getting the testing done. This has led to some individuals who have refused to participate in studies and clinical trials that could have life-changing diagnostic implications that can help eradicate certain diseases.

Individuals should never have to choose between a life-saving medical test and employment or insurance. That is why Bill 30 is an opportunity for us, as legislators, to protect individuals who are unaware of the unintended consequences.

In this area, Canada and Ontario are lagging behind in safeguarding our citizens against genetic discrimination. Canada remains the only G7 nation that does not have specific protections in place to prevent genetic discrimination. There is proof that placing safeguards on genetic characteristics can lead to a healthier population.

Other jurisdictions, such as the UK, that have genetic discrimination laws in place have made changes against discrimination since 1995, and, in fact, their insurance rates have gone down. Rates have gone down because individuals are proactively taking care of their health.

Ontario has an opportunity to take a leadership role with our federal government and ensure that a person's rights, including their genetic characteristics, are protected. The provincial government, as we know, is responsible for employment and insurance laws, and that is why we need provincial legislation to create safeguards for individuals from genetic discrimination. That is why we need to pass Bill 30.

If passed, Bill 30 would amend the Human Rights Code to include genetic characteristics as a prohibited ground of discrimination. The bill sets out that every individual "has a right to equal treatment, without discrimination because of genetic characteristics, with respect to services, goods and facilities, the occupancy of accommodation, the right to contract, and employment and membership in various types of organizations." Every individual has "the right to equal treatment if a person refuses to undergo or disclose the results of a genetic test." No longer would an individual have to fear being discriminated against if they had a genetic test and chose not to share the results.

As well, they would no longer have to fear that their genetic characteristics could be used against them. This is an important protection. Approximately 91% of Canadians don't believe their genetic information should be used against them. Speaker, I agree. Again, it is important we understand that just because you have a certain genetic marker does not mean you will actually develop a specific condition. It's time for the law to catch up with the science.

Bill 30 and today's debate is as much as about public awareness as it is about public protection. We need to make sure people understand the current rules, and we need to make changes. It's important that an individual's rights are protected, and that includes their genetic characteristics.

I'm proud to support Bill 30, and I thank the member from Eglinton–Lawrence for raising it.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I appreciate the opportunity to address this bill today. First, I want to thank the member from Eglinton–Lawrence and the member from

Dufferin–Caledon for bringing forward this bill. I understand, member from Eglinton–Lawrence, that you've been doing this for a while, but I appreciate the efforts of both of you.

Frankly, I knew very little about this matter until I was asked to speak by my caucus. So I actually took the time to go and take a look at the literature that's out there. The reality is that the world is changing very, very fast, and our laws are not changing to keep up with those technological advances.

As you've outlined in both your speeches, there's no question that there is an opportunity now for people to find out so much more about their own biology, which we should ensure they have an opportunity to take advantage of. They should not be in a position where they are intimidated by the risk that they will be not be able to access life insurance or, frankly, other opportunities in this society should it turn out that that genetic testing shows the potential for a biological problem further along in their lives.

There's no question in any mind that all of us—frankly, we all live in a life that's a giant lottery. You never know when the numbers are going to come up against you and what the factor or issue is that will cause that problem, that undermining of our lives. Genetic testing can show a proclivity, can show a predisposition, but doesn't, as far as I have been able to read, guarantee a destiny. It just raises the chances that someone will encounter a biological problem somewhat further along in their lives. So to put people in a position where they would be discriminated against, where they would not have the opportunity to avail themselves of all of the supports and safeguards in our lives, seems inherently unfair.

So I want to say that I appreciate the both of you taking the time to bring it forward.

For those who are watching today, I just want to take a little bit from the explanatory note in the bill, so you know exactly what we're talking about.

This bill "amends the Human Rights Code to include genetic characteristics as a prohibited ground of discrimination. The act currently includes race, marital status and disability, among other things, as prohibited grounds of discrimination."

So what they're saying is that our inherent biology should not be used against us, and tests that fill out our understanding of that inherent biology shouldn't be used against us. I would say that everyone can understand why that is entirely fair and, in fact, everyone can understand why government should be taking action to bring forward those protections.

"In addition to other amendments, various sections are amended to provide that every person has a right to equal treatment, without discrimination because of genetic characteristics, with respect to services, goods and facilities, the occupancy of accommodation, the right to contract, and employment and membership in various types of organizations. This includes the right to equal treatment if a person refuses to undergo or disclose the results

of a genetic test. High-value insurance contracts are permitted to differentiate or make a distinction, exclusion or preference on reasonable and bona fide grounds because of genetic characteristics.”

1550

I want to talk to that second part regarding high-value insurance contracts. You're noting that we have a long history of saying that because of your biological history or your relationship status, you should not be discriminated against. Again, everyone should see this as a straightforward trajectory from that history of standing up for human rights. You have done that, and again, I appreciate it and I believe you should be applauded for taking this step.

I'm concerned by the issue that there is still an allowance for discrimination by insurance companies for high-value life insurance policies. I don't know if either of you will be able to discuss it when you make your final comments, but I'd very much like to hear what you have to say. I think you've made a strong argument that your genetic history doesn't guarantee that you will come down with this, that or the other condition. I worry about this, and I see this in some ways as either a sop to insurance companies or protection of insurance companies, and I need to understand what your arguments are.

My hope is that your bill goes further than debate here today, that it actually makes it to committee and becomes part of the legislation. It is a very sound piece of legislation. That's one item, though, that I would like to be addressed. I'd like to hear it, if it gets to committee, addressed in greater detail.

Colleagues, we're coming to this game very late. I think that point was made by both of my colleagues. I just want to note that the United Nations came out with a declaration on the human genome and human rights back in 1997. It was endorsed by the general assembly in 1998. It's only 18 years later. Sometimes we're a bit slow on the pick-up on these things, but far better late than never, and I'm glad you actually have brought it forward.

Mr. Colle, the member from Eglinton–Lawrence, mentioned an article in the *Toronto Star*. I came across either the same one or a similar one from June 2009, showing that there was clearly discrimination based solely on perceived genetic risks. It isn't as though this is an unknown item. The technology has moved along far enough now that companies understand that they can have an understanding in greater depth of people's biological backgrounds. Unfortunately, some will take advantage of that.

The reality is that if you don't have genetic testing now, you may in future be asked to do a genetic test to apply for insurance. We don't want to be in a situation where people are forced into having a genetic test and then having the results of that test used against them. It's far better for us to adopt this piece of legislation now, put it through committee, put it through third reading and have it in place rather than any one of us, at a later point in our lives, being asked to do a genetic test and finding out things we had no knowledge of and finding that we

are barred from life insurance or other facilities that this society has to offer.

Clearly, this is something that is being discussed more and more widely. There have been private members' bills at the federal level, in the Senate. The Library of Parliament has done some extensive research on this, looking at what's happening in other countries. I think, the member from Dufferin–Caledon, you looked at what other countries have done.

Again, we're very late to this game, so another reason for this bill to be treated seriously, and, if it passes today, to go to committee and go on to third reading. It is going to make a difference in our lives and the lives of many, many other people.

With that, Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity and I turn the debate back to my colleagues.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Hon. Eleanor McMahon: I love Thursday afternoons because it's really a great time for all of us to talk about things that we're passionate about. This is such an interesting conversation. I'm so honoured to be able to join the member from Dufferin–Caledon and the member from Eglinton–Lawrence, and I salute them for bringing forward this really important bill. Like the member from Toronto–Danforth—his excellent words, by the way, elucidated on how this is an opportunity for all of us to learn. I salute him for that, but I join him in that commentary as well.

I knew a little bit about genetic testing, Speaker, but this was really a great opportunity. I've learned a lot about it in terms of its potential. Again, I want to salute the two members who have brought this idea forward. Bill 30 is really a bill whose time has come. As the member for Toronto–Danforth mentioned, better late than never. I couldn't echo those comments more strongly. We are a little late to the party in Ontario, but we're here now and it's so important. Again, doing a bit of research on this issue really underscores how critically important it is.

Bill 30, as we know—again, for those watching who might want a bit more background—really seeks to amend the Human Rights Code to protect Ontarians from genetic discrimination based on real or perceived differences in their genetic characteristics. By adding the term “genetic characteristics” as a protected ground, Bill 30 will ensure that Ontarians will receive equal treatment regardless of actual or perceived differences in their genetic makeup, especially with regard to employment and insurance contracts.

Already in the debate we've heard some concerns about how information is power and how that helps people in their life journey. It gives them important information. It allows them to plan. It gives them information they might not have had. The notion that they would then be punished for that information and it would be shared and used against them is really pernicious, and we need to obviously safeguard against that.

In terms of further background on the legislation itself, it's important to know that as precision medicine be-

comes more prevalent, the province must do its part to safeguard the genetic information of Ontarians. If this bill were passed, Ontarians would feel safe in undergoing a genetic test, knowing that employers and insurers, landlords or others could not request or require that information, because right now, that is not the case.

According to a survey conducted by three doctors at SickKids hospital, 86% of individuals with a family history of Huntington disease feared genetic discrimination; 40% actually experienced it, many by life and long-term disability insurers. It's absolutely clear that we need legislation to protect those folks who decide to undertake this important kind of health measure in their own interests of helping them plan their life's journey.

Many people have children. Their children get genetic testing. We need to safeguard against those children and their lives being ruined by some potential use against them of that critical and highly personal information. Information is power, as I mentioned earlier, but it must not be used against people. Bill 30 will outlaw this kind of discrimination and let Ontarians gain access to their genetic information without fear. Again, that is incredibly important.

Colleagues have mentioned the Toronto Star. I just want to quote from a piece by Lorne Marin. I think my colleague from Eglinton–Lawrence mentioned him earlier. He's a member of the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs' Task Force on Genetic Discrimination. He wrote a very poignant piece in the Toronto Star in September, talking about his issue with Usher syndrome, which is a genetically inherited, progressive condition afflicting an estimated 400,000 people worldwide.

He says: "For many patients, myself included, what begins as night and peripheral vision loss gradually leads to blindness, deafness and deteriorated balance." He goes on to talk about the fact that "while genetic testing may not yet hold the key to" any "serious health challenges, this is an area of research that holds tremendous promise for a myriad of conditions and diseases—and could reshape how we manage our health in the next generation."

Here is someone who poignantly talks about the importance of more information that helps him, that could help his family, that could help him manage this critical health issue that he has, and his fear and concern that if we don't give protection to individuals who, like him, have these genetic conditions, they are really out there on their own. That must be terribly frightening. I empathize with him and again salute my colleagues for putting this legislation forward.

He goes on to talk about the Canadian Cancer Society, which, for example, notes that women with a breast cancer marker who undergo genetic testing and take preventive measures can reduce their risk by nearly 90%.

Speaker, my time is drawing to a close, but I want to, in closing, urge everyone on all sides of the House to support this very important bill, and to thank the member from Dufferin–Caledon and my colleague from Eglinton–Lawrence for putting this forward and for allowing me to participate in this very important conversation.

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The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mrs. Gila Martow: I'm very pleased to rise and speak in support of Bill 30, the Human Rights Code Amendment Act (Genetic Characteristics). It's put forward by the member from Eglinton–Lawrence and co-sponsored by my colleague, the member from Dufferin–Caledon.

I'm very pleased that I have a few moments to speak, because this is something that I have actually—I think people are going to be very surprised when they hear this—received in my office more emails on, this issue of genetic discrimination, than I have received on any other issue.

People here might find that very peculiar because they get hundreds of emails about hydro, about the family resource office—all kinds of emails. But honestly, this tipped the scale, because in just one month I received that many emails. I've never received that many emails in such a short time on a topic before.

Part of it was that there was an article in the Canadian Jewish News. I just want to mention that this is of very great concern to the Jewish community. Thornhill is represented by at least 50%, I think, of the Jewish faith. That's why we have so many members here from the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs—CIJA, we call it. I just want to call out some names of people who are here: Sara Lefton, Madi Murariu, and also one of my constituents is here, Shir Barzilay, who does a lot of great advocacy work for them.

I just want to say that the reason it's of particular interest is because there are a lot of genetic mutations that could result, as the member from Dufferin–Caledon mentioned, but there is no guarantee that you will develop the disease. Also there is a lot of interest in ensuring that people go for genetic testing if it means that they can have early treatment, because that's what it's really about. It's about if people don't get the genetic testing which is available, the doctors can't conclusively say what the issue is and it might delay treatment or it might mean that they're not going to get treated at all. We all know that that's not in anybody's best interest.

The fact is, Madam Speaker, that Jews of eastern European descent—we call them Ashkenazi Jews, of which I am one—are disproportionately likely to inherit certain genetic markers associated with some very major illnesses, including mutations linked to breast and ovarian cancer.

It's scary enough to go for testing when you know you have a family member who's died of a disease. It's scary enough to go for the testing, but I think that in the Jewish community we recognize that we certainly don't want people not going for the testing because of worries over receiving employment or insurance—and, yes, there was even a case listed in the article that I read where somebody asked for genetic testing to get a lease.

There have been some very good quotes from people that I just want to mention. The Minister of Tourism,

Culture and Sport just said that information is power. That's what it's about. There's no point going to see a doctor who recommends genetic testing in order to do the treatment and the people are unwilling to go because of fears. We need, as my colleague said, to catch up with the science. Why are we spending so much of taxpayers' money and private money, with organizations and doctors spending their life doing research developing all of these markers and genetic testing, if we're not allowing the people of Ontario to take advantage of it the way they are able to do freely and in good conscience in other jurisdictions?

I want to end by saying that my son had genetic testing, my third son, Mitch. It was found that he has Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome. It was suspected that he had Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome but we could not say conclusively until he went for genetic testing.

I'm not saying this for selfish reasons, but I think everybody out there who wants to go for genetic testing—I want them to be able to go freely, thinking that they're doing the right thing and they are not going to have regrets later.

It's our responsibility here to ensure that they are going to be treated fairly. The whole point of insurance is so that we're all collectively helping each other. We want people to feel comfortable that they're going to get insurance, that they're going to be able to get the job that they deserve and that they should go for that genetic testing.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Miss Monique Taylor: I'll start by, again, adding my voice to the congratulations to the member from Eglinton–Lawrence for bringing this bill back several times and to the member from Dufferin–Caledon for joining in this fight, knowing that it's the right thing to do for the people of Ontario.

I want to say, Speaker, that I welcome this important amendment to Ontario's Human Rights Code, which will ensure accommodation, services, insurance coverage and many more things that might currently be out of reach for people who are discriminated against because of their genetic code. Discrimination that is based on a genetic code is unjust and it is inconsistent with the standard of human rights in Ontario. There is no basis for including race, marital status, disability, gender and other things in our code, but it leaves out discrimination against genetic coding. As my colleague said before me, I believe that's due because of the strides that we have made when it comes to research and technology in being able to do this much better.

Genetic testing should be done for the greater good, as we've heard, because it can allow people the ability to see if there are things in their family in the past and whether they should be tested to be able to ensure that they have the ability, if possible, that they could avoid some of those health issues. But to find that it is being used as discrimination is quite troubling.

I knew nothing about genetic testing and discrimination before I started to look it up for this bill. I'll tell you,

Speaker, I found it very interesting how long this has been going on. It has been going on right across Canada. This is Canadian law that people are talking about and have been talking about since—the first one that I found was October 2012. There was a private member's bill in the House of Commons by Libby Davies, a New Democrat, adding genetic characteristics to the human rights act. She tried then.

It was tried again in April 2013 by the Honourable James S. Cowan. He introduced Bill S-218. On October 16, 2013, there was a speech from the throne from the Governor General talking about genetic testing. And it just goes on and on and on. You're included in this list, the member from Eglinton–Lawrence, on November 4, 2013.

This is something that has been going on. Several times, as I've listed, within our walls of history, on the Internet, that is talking about this. It's talking about the need to move forward to ensure that there is not discrimination when it comes to genetic testing. Like I said, there are so many good benefits that can come from it. If people are afraid to use those benefits because of the possible outcome at the end of the day when it comes to jobs, insurance and many factors, then it is our responsibility to make sure that we put things in place to secure people to ensure that they are safe from people who choose to use different loopholes to their own benefit.

I'm really pleased to lend my voice. I was also listening to my colleague and his concerns when it came to section 22.1, the restrictions for insurance contracts, and to be able to look at that a little further to ensure that we know what that means when it comes to committee.

Congratulations. I'm sure it will be passing through second reading today. We'll look forward to seeing it at committee.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Bob Delaney: Let's look at why this is important. Imagine that I am an insurance agent. I have to sell the products that my suppliers have. I have to abide by my suppliers' terms and conditions, which may include whom to exclude and why. It doesn't matter that much, as an insurance agent, what I think or what I believe. It doesn't matter what science says, what clinical trials have shown or even what my personal experience may be. It's just business. That's why this Legislature needs to lead with this bill.

What we're talking about is genetic information, but what if what we were talking about would be the colour of your eyes or your hair, your religion, your race, your gender, your education, your place of origin? We would call that discrimination. We would condemn it in this Legislature. We would condemn it in our social norms, in our media and in our popular culture.

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I'd like to quote Albert Einstein. What he said is that not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted. We can apply that

to this matter of genetic information. You can measure the output of genetic tests. You can write algorithms that use that data to tell you the possibility or probability of something happening. We can see empirically how many standard deviations from the mean your DNA or your test results take you. And up to a point, so what?

If you want to, you can even use that type of information to justify never issuing an insurance policy to anyone, or to justify a higher premium for everyone. If that strikes you as stupid, it's because it is. Who would justify issuing, on that very narrow basis, an insurance policy to Dr. Stephen Hawking or to Ludwig van Beethoven or to Vincent van Gogh, all of whom must have had genetic markers that would have shown that they, too, would be at risk of something?

This bill urges people to do the right thing at the right time for the right reasons and not to fear sanctions or denial of coverage. If we let the coders, the statisticians, the paper shufflers and the number crunchers decide that discrimination is purely a matter of business, then that's exactly what they'll do. What the member from Eglinton–Lawrence has asked the Legislature is, let's use our heads. Let's set the common terms, the ground rules that make common sense, and let's make sure that we, as individuals, can continue to find out what the truth is about our bodies and to be able to take intelligent action about them in time and never to fear consequences.

That's why I favour this bill, and that's why I hope that this Legislature will pass it and pass it strongly.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: It's a pleasure to speak to Bill 30. We have heard from all sides why this bill is important. I'm really pleased to see the support from all sides of this House.

The overarching intent of this bill is to seek an amendment to the Ontario Human Rights Code to prevent genetic discrimination based on real or perceived differences in one's genetic makeup. With the advancement in medical sciences, the unravelling of one's genetic code through more sophisticated testing is becoming increasingly necessary to identify possible diseases or conditions to which one may be susceptible, for the purpose of treatment or prevention.

However, information obtained through genetic testing for health care purposes must be protected. No one should be allowed to abuse sensitive information and discriminate against due to one's real or perceived genetic makeup in matters such as insurance, housing, employment etc. At present, in Ontario, such information is not protected by any law. That can expose anyone to genetic discrimination, regardless of gender, race, ancestry or geographical location.

Madam Speaker, we, as a society, are moving past what was once considered to be science fiction. We need to ensure that protections for our citizens are consistent with new threats. If Bill 30 becomes law, it will ensure that citizens are protected from disclosing the most

personal information imaginable: the information that makes up their very being, their genetic information.

Genetic testing is also available for roughly 2,000 conditions, some rare and some common, which means that far more people than we realize are exposed to this threat of discrimination. This bill acknowledges genetic characteristics to be not only the conditions one may currently have, but which one may simply be at risk of developing—so not actually sick at all. Genetic testing itself is incredibly valuable to protecting one's health and the health of one's family. It is the threat of its abuse that makes this bill more important.

I thank the member from Eglinton–Lawrence for putting this bill forward. I appreciate his foresight and thoughtfulness. I'm looking forward to this bill passing at second reading and going before the committee so that it can become law.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I return back to the member from Eglinton–Lawrence to wrap up.

Mr. Mike Colle: I want to thank the members for excellent input on this bill. It was really very heartening to see such intelligence coming forward. It was really helpful in getting my head around this complex bill. Thank you very much.

I want to thank my co-sponsor, the member from Dufferin–Caledon, for her great support; the member from Mississauga–Brampton South, who just spoke; the member from Hamilton Mountain; the members from Burlington and Thornhill; the member from Mississauga–Streetsville; and the member for Toronto–Danforth—it was an excellent presentation.

I just think that it's as if, when someone told you, "Well, if you get an X-ray or you get an MRI or a blood test"—which you have to get to treat some kind of illness you may have or prevent something from happening—you'd be afraid to get that information because those results could be used against you to deny you certain things, or to discriminate against you. But that's what is happening right now with genetic testing.

I just had one of the members of the Legislature come up to me and say that he's having this problem with his three kids. What are they going to do? Do they get tested? If they get tested, then the children—it was just right now that I had somebody come up to me and tell me that.

The minister for accessibility, Tracy MacCharles, just said that she's gone through so much genetic testing and has been through this conundrum herself: What about the kids? Should the kids know and should we find out? But right now, you're afraid to do it, because there are consequences and there's no protection. So you go through hell trying to guard your kids' health or your own, and then you've got this cloud hanging over your head where you can't get the health help because of this discrimination.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

CHILDREN'S LAW REFORM
AMENDMENT ACT (RELATIONSHIP
WITH GRANDPARENTS), 2016

LOI DE 2016 MODIFIANT LA LOI
PORTANT RÉFORME DU DROIT
DE L'ENFANCE (RELATION
AVEC LES GRANDS-PARENTS)

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): We will deal first with ballot item number 16, standing in the name of Mr. Mantha.

Mr. Mantha has moved second reading of Bill 34, An Act to amend the Children's Law Reform Act with respect to the relationship between a child and the child's grandparents.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I'm going to turn to the member to identify which standing committee.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Regulations and private bills.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Do we agree? Agreed. Congratulations.

HINDU HERITAGE MONTH ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LE MOIS
DU PATRIMOINE HINDOU

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Mr. Dickson has moved second reading of Bill 56, An Act to proclaim the month of November Hindu Heritage Month.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I'm going to turn to Mr. Dickson, the member from Ajax-Pickering, to identify which committee.

Mr. Joe Dickson: I would be pleased if you would refer the bill to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Okay. Does it carry? Agreed. Congratulations.

HUMAN RIGHTS CODE
AMENDMENT ACT
(GENETIC CHARACTERISTICS), 2016

LOI DE 2016 MODIFIANT LE CODE
DES DROITS DE LA PERSONNE
(CARACTÉRISTIQUES GÉNÉTIQUES)

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Mr. Colle has moved second reading of Bill 30, An Act to amend the Human Rights Code with respect to genetic characteristics.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I'm going to turn to the member for Eglinton–Lawrence to identify which committee.

Mr. Mike Colle: Madam Chair, I'd like to refer the bill to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Agreed? Agreed. Congratulations.

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ORDERS OF THE DAY

AGGREGATE RESOURCES AND
MINING MODERNIZATION ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LA MODERNISATION
DES SECTEURS DES RESSOURCES
EN AGRÉGATS ET DES MINES

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 2, 2016, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 39, An Act to amend the Aggregate Resources Act and the Mining Act / Projet de loi 39, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les ressources en agrégats et la Loi sur les mines.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Joe Dickson: This, of course, is on the second reading of Bill 39, the Aggregate Resources and Mining Modernization Act. I will be sharing my time with the minister responsible for seniors affairs.

I rise in the Legislature to speak to Bill 39, the Aggregate Resources and Mining Modernization Act. As you may recall, the Ontario government introduced the bill on October 6. Today I'd like to speak to the amendments related to the Aggregate Resources Act first, and I will speak about schedule 2 of this bill afterwards.

The development of this proposed legislation was informed by an extensive and thorough consultation process. This process enabled the collection of invaluable input from many stakeholders, indigenous communities and interested parties in an open and transparent way. Through this engagement, Ontario has established a clear map of the future legislation and regulatory needs for the province's aggregate resources management framework.

Given the wide application of aggregate resources, the way in which aggregates are managed in Ontario has direct and indirect implications for many parties. Aggregate resource management is a complex policy area, and there are differing opinions on the management of this finite resource. To better understand the areas of concern and explore solutions that would allow the effective drafting of this bill, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry intently listened to the many views of a cross-section of stakeholders and people throughout the province.

Speaker, you may recall that in 2012 the Ontario Legislature passed a motion calling on the Standing Committee on General Government to review the Aggre-

gate Resources Act. In the fall of 2013, the standing committee reported to the House its observations and recommendations regarding various aspects of aggregate resources management in Ontario. The ministry considered these recommendations and comments expressed during the standing committee's review, collected through eight public hearings, written submissions, site visits and, of course, research.

In the fall of 2014, the ministry launched an extensive consultation process to gather further input from stakeholders, indigenous communities and organizations, municipal associations, experts and other ministries on topics related to this important resource. Through these initial discussions, the ministry began to establish a clearer understanding of future legislation and regulatory needs for aggregate resources management.

In the fall of 2015, Ontario released its consultation document, *A Blueprint for Change*. The proposals presented in this document were developed in consideration of the standing committee's recommendations and the initial round of discussions. They reflected changes across the entire policy framework, legislation, regulation, provincial standards and policies. This document was posted on the Environmental Registry for public comment, and facilitated sessions were held with indigenous organizations and key stakeholders. More than 400 submissions were received on the blueprint.

Ontario collected the recommendations from the standing committee and valuable comments obtained from other ministries and during public stakeholder and indigenous engagement. They were combined with the ministry's knowledge of identified delivery needs and policy gaps in the existing framework and the need to have a modern and flexible Aggregate Resources Act framework for the future. Informed by this information and knowledge, the ministry developed the proposed legislative amendments that have been put forward in this bill.

This proposed legislation was the result of many months of co-operation and dialogue amongst a number of organizations and individuals who participated in the consultation process and provided written submissions.

I'll just interject for a second, Speaker. I know I'm sharing this, and I just want to make sure that we do an equal share.

Interjection.

Mr. Joe Dickson: You want me to do another five and stand on my head. Okay, I will do that. I'll finish this first.

This includes municipalities; agricultural, environmental and community organizations; industry groups; indigenous communities; and the public—organizations like Gravel Watch Ontario, a coalition composed of citizens' groups, non-governmental organizations and individuals across Ontario, and the Ontario Stone, Sand and Gravel Association, or, as we know it, OSSGA.

OSSGA represents over 280 sand, gravel and crushed stone producers and suppliers in this province. Its membership collectively supplies the substantial majority of aggregate produced in our province.

It includes agricultural organizations such as the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, representing more than 36,000 farm families across Ontario, and the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario, representing another 4,000 family farms.

It's interesting to note that Agriculture Minister Jeff Leal has been here most of the day. That's how intense this has been.

It also includes environmental stakeholders like Environmental Defence and the Canadian Environmental Law Association, both strong advocates for environmental protection in this province and beyond.

Just from the desk, if I may, which minister is coming in?

Interjection.

Mr. Joe Dickson: Who is here. Okay; that's fine. I thought it was one of the two ministers I've related to this.

It includes Conservation Ontario, which advocates for the interests of the province's 36 conservation authorities that conserve, restore and manage Ontario natural resources on a watershed basis.

All of these organizations provided valuable, informed feedback on behalf of their members and thousands of Ontario residents.

Likewise, indigenous communities and organizations have been engaged in the process, from the very start to this current major milestone. The ministry held regional sessions for indigenous participants across the province, and meetings with interested organizations and communities on request.

I'd like to note that the proposed legislation includes a provision that acknowledges the province's current obligations to ensure that indigenous communities are consulted when their rights may be impacted.

Future regulatory and policy changes for applications and amendments would support the improved participation of indigenous communities. For example, *A Blueprint for Change* included a proposal to encourage more pre-consultation with communities before an application proposal is submitted.

A Blueprint for Change also proposed that the aggregate proponent be required to provide separate documentation of notification and consultation of activities with indigenous communities. There would also be future opportunities to provide feedback on any new regulatory measures and changes to current regulations and policies through indigenous community and public consultation processes.

The Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, more commonly known as MNRF, is committed to moving forward in a manner that is consistent with the constitutional recognition of existing aboriginal and treaty rights.

I'm just trying to feel this and gauge five minutes left. I'll do a little minute or two and then I'll refer that on, if that's fine with you.

Ontario municipalities have contributed significantly to this process. Municipalities play an important role in managing aggregate resources on private land under the

Planning Act. Municipal zoning must allow the use of the site for a pit or quarry before a licence under the Aggregate Resources Act can be issued.

The ministry has engaged with municipal associations since the fall of 2014, and the valuable input received has been considered in the development of the blueprint proposals and the proposed legislation.

At this point, Madam Speaker, I'm going to take a breather and sit down for the minister. I am just commencing the top of page 13.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm pleased to recognize the minister to continue the debate.

Hon. Dipika Damerla: I am also very pleased to rise today to lend my support to Bill 39, the Aggregate Resources and Mining Modernization Act.

Mr. Speaker, as you can imagine, this modernization comes at exactly the right time here in Ontario when you think about this government's commitment to infrastructure projects. Of course, you can't build anything without using aggregate. So consider the fact that this government has probably the most ambitious agenda in the history of this country—not just the province, but this country—when it comes to building infrastructure: \$160 billion. That's a lot of aggregate we are talking about. It's great for the economy, it's great for Ontarians and it's great for jobs. We also need to make sure, as we go forth with this big expansion of infrastructure, that the vertical supply channels, which include aggregate as a big raw material—that we modernize the legislation and the rules around it.

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On top of that, our federal cousins have also now embarked on what is typical of Liberals, of course, which is understanding that we have to build up the province, we have to build up the country. Layering on top of the provincial Liberal \$160-billion plan is another \$60-billion plan from the federal government. The reason I'm bringing this up is just to say that it couldn't be more timely, the need for the Aggregate Resources and Mining Modernization Act. It was really my privilege to be sitting next to the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry when she first introduced the bill back on October 6 and to lend my voice to the debate.

I just wanted to touch a little bit on some of the things that this bill will do. The bill will modernize how we, as a government, oversee, regulate and manage the aggregate industry in Ontario. As I mentioned earlier, aggregate is an essential component in the ongoing renewal of Ontario's infrastructure. It is used in a wide range of construction activities, from highways and subway tunnels to office buildings and hospitals. In fact, I suspect we can't go anywhere and we can't spend a minute of our lives without in some way being touched by aggregate, because it's all around us.

Aggregate resource development is, of course, an important component of the Ontario economy, and this bill puts in place a modern regulatory framework. This will help both industry and our communities as we make use of this resource for much-needed infrastructure upgrades and further development.

As a government, our responsibility is to strike a fine balance between strengthening our economy, creating jobs and supporting local communities, all the while protecting the natural beauty of this province. I really want to speak to that idea, because sometimes there's a false dichotomy, a belief that development and modernization can only come at the cost of the environment and destruction of natural beauty. Today, we have the technology that allows us to both develop and harness Ontario's natural resources without devastating our environment or the beauty of this beautiful province.

I truly, once again, want to take the opportunity to applaud the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry for her work on this bill and in achieving that delicate balance between protecting our environment but at the same time ensuring that economic growth continues in Ontario and that Ontario continues to be the economic engine of Canada. As Ontarians, we can take so much pride that today our province truly is back in that role of being the economic engine of Canada. We must all take so much pride in that. It's not a partisan comment. I think the reason Ontario's economy is doing so well is because of Ontarians: our hard work, our resources and our ingenuity.

I'm also pleased that Bill 39 honours our government's commitment to openness and transparency. The bill promises enhanced oversight of aggregate operations, public access to information and new mechanisms for public consultation, all essential components of any industry modernization.

The bill also establishes a clearer process for changing existing approvals and allows for customized consultation plans on applications. This is just the type of flexibility that Ontarians have told us they expect from their government, and we are delivering on that.

We have also listened to the concerns of a wide range of stakeholders, including, of course, our municipalities and industry experts, who have developed a process which will ensure the continued strength of this important industry.

What I truly appreciate most about this bill—and there is so much to appreciate about it, but I do want to point out a couple of things in particular that I'm very appreciative of. It guarantees that modernization and growth is not done on the back of the environment. I spoke to this earlier as well. But, to me, that really is the linchpin of this legislation: getting that balance right.

The bill ensures enhanced environmental protection for aggregate sites. This includes a cap on the amount of area which can be disturbed at any given time, as well as establishes performance indicators for rehabilitation, monitoring and reporting.

That rehabilitation piece is really, really key. In the city of Mississauga right now, there really isn't a lot of the aggregate industry. But I was driving—I'm trying to remember, maybe it was just north of Caledon; Sylvia might know that. I was just driving along, and I remember stopping because I saw this site that used to be a quarry. Then I was very curious because I've heard how

the industry has tried to rehabilitate. I was curious enough to actually stop my car, jump out and take a look. I have to say that, in this particular case, they did a fantastic job. Kudos to the industry for already doing that, but I think that this bill strengthens those kinds of initiatives.

Additionally, this bill acknowledges the province's obligation to ensure that indigenous communities are consulted when their rights may be impacted. That has been an ongoing priority for—I'm just checking, am I going over?

Okay, I'm doing fine.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: You have three minutes.

Hon. Dipika Damerla: Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I was just going to say that you have three minutes, as far as I'm concerned. I would appreciate you making your comments to the Chair.

Hon. Dipika Damerla: Sometimes, you get the looks from staff and you want to make sure—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you.

Hon. Dipika Damerla: Thank you.

Additionally, this bill acknowledges—like I was saying—the province's obligations to ensure that indigenous communities are consulted. I think that we can all agree that this Premier, Kathleen Wynne, has shown exemplary leadership when it comes to recognizing the rights of Ontario's First Nations people. Extensive consultations were conducted in advance of the introduction of this bill with First Nations and Métis people.

I don't believe there could be any question that this bill responsibly addresses the need for modernization, economic growth and job creation, as well as the responsibility that we all have to protect our vital resources like prime farmland and groundwater.

Often, I say about government legislation that sometimes it's hard for people to always understand the full scope of the legislation, because it can seem a little removed from their lives. But I think that aggregate is something that I just want Ontarians and people in my riding of Mississauga East—Cooksville to know about. When you look at your home, when you look at the office you're working in, when you're looking at the highway that's being paved—the extension to Highway 401, the extra lane that was added on Highway 401 near Britannia in Mississauga—all of this used aggregate.

So I just want you to know that what this bill is really doing is making sure, even as we, as I guess that the correct word would be, mine our quarries for this aggregate in Ontario—what this bill is doing is ensuring that the environment is protected, that Ontario's First Nations people have been consulted, that all of the stakeholders who are impacted by this are consulted, and that it balances our rights and our duties and our responsibilities to our province, to our environment and to all of our stakeholders.

I really am pleased to stand in support of this bill. I really look forward to the debate. I look forward to hearing the views of the PC Party, as well as the NDP. I

know that this bill was originally introduced, I believe, on October 6. We've already had some debate, but I truly look forward to listening to all of the views to make this a better bill.

I was thinking about what Clerk Deb Deller said, and it really left an impact when she pointed to the owl on that side and said that it's for the government to govern wisely, but also for the opposition to keep us in check. I just want to thank all of you for what you do.

In that spirit of collaboration, I look forward to listening to well-thought-out arguments. The only thing that I always say to my friends in opposition is that your criticisms would have more credibility if you took the time to say at least some of the things were right. I think it lacks complete credibility when you say everything is wrong. On that note, I hope that in the end we will all support this bill.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'm glad to rise to comment on Bill 39. We look forward on this side to holding the government to account and to keeping an eye on them, as the symbol of the owl up there and the eagle said.

Just a number of things: I'd like to pay tribute to three of my colleagues who I know worked very hard on this bill over the years, the member from Kitchener—Conestoga, Michael Harris, the member from Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, Laurie Scott, and of course the member from Dufferin—Caledon, Sylvia Jones, who all worked very hard and had a lot of input into this, going back a number of years now. I'm looking forward to the member from Dufferin—Caledon's remarks a little later as she adds her voice to this bill. She has real experience in this.

I'm thinking about aggregate and gravel pits and that. I go back a long ways. When I was very young, I spent a lot of time in those types of facilities because my father was a contractor. I never dreamt I'd be here speaking today, over 50 years later, to aggregate bills and sand and gravel deposits. I was sitting here thinking about that. It was a very enjoyable time, at that time.

There are a number of issues that we wanted to raise on the bill. The government continues to boast about infrastructure plans, and if that's the case, we will certainly need aggregate over the next decade. The industry in Ontario brings something like \$1.5 billion in GDP to the province every year and employs, directly or indirectly, over 16,000 people. So those people certainly are interested in this bill.

Pits and quarries often encounter stiff opposition wherever they are and when they try to relocate. This bill, hopefully, will do something to alleviate that. I know a number of other provinces have also worked to make some changes in their registration.

With that, I think my time is up, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to be able to stand in this House, and today on Bill 39, revisions to the Mining Act and to the Aggregate Resources Act—very important. Actually, I listened intently to the comments from the government, and there are a lot of good things in this bill.

There are actually two bills, from our point of view, because aggregate and mining are two totally different issues. It's a bit confusing that they're lumped into one. Both issues are very important to my part of the world, but mining especially because—a lot of people don't know this—where I'm from, and in most of northern Ontario, the Aggregate Resources Act doesn't apply—it doesn't apply. So to lump two bills together where one bill doesn't apply to the vast majority of the province just really doesn't make sense to me. That's maybe not a party position, but as a northerner that really doesn't make sense.

Every time I hear about the \$160 billion over 10 years, way longer than this government's mandate, how this is bigger than any government has ever done, you know what? We should do the numbers on the inflation, because when they actually built the railroad to northern Ontario, it was a pretty big deal. They actually got it done and they didn't have to hear about it for years and years like the Ring of Fire.

I remember when I first got elected here and I remember the press release about where the smelter was going to go and all the thousands of jobs. At that point, the government knew they had to have consultation with the First Nations. But that didn't matter; the press release mattered for the thousands of jobs. That's the problem. We actually have to sit down and look at these instead of just putting out the press release. I'll never forget that press release. And where are we now with the Ring of Fire? No further than five years ago.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. Arthur Potts: I'm attempting to do up my coat here. Politics have been very good to me, and my suit's not fitting like it used to.

Speaker, I'm delighted to have this opportunity to respond to the member from Ajax-Pickering and the minister responsible for seniors affairs. She's also the Minister without Portfolio, which is interesting; that's a two-pronged responsibility, and all of us are wondering, what is she doing with that other responsibility? I'm sure we'll hear about it at some point.

But what I'd like to speak directly to the comments that were made by our respective members on this side of the House, particularly by the member from Ajax-Pickering. Some of the work I've had in my previous life as a consultant with the aggregate resources industry—Aggregate Recycling Ontario was an agency we started—I got to know some of the engineers around Ajax-Pickering and the municipalities there, trying to encourage them to use more recycled aggregate in the products in their construction developments.

There is an interesting thing about the geology in that community: The ground is extraordinarily calcified.

Groundwater and run-off water in Ajax-Pickering tend to clog and calcify the drainage piping that they put in, and it's become a really big issue. Using appropriate recycled aggregate from other parts of Ontario could actually be a really useful solution to assisting in drainage around those properties.

I particularly wanted to refer to some of the remarks that were made by the minister responsible for seniors affairs. She talked about the great leadership of our Premier, which is always something that gets me very excited, because I would agree with her and I know many in this House do.

Interjection.

Mr. Arthur Potts: But it's one of those issues that gets the member from Sarnia—you know you're speaking the truth when all of a sudden he gets animated and starts to think about what that really means down there in Sarnia, because it may not be the view he's getting from a small minority—a portion—of his constituents. But in my neighbourhood, I can assure you that her leadership is recognized and is very much appreciated, and not just in the way that we are building Ontario up, with all our investments and our responsible use of aggregate, but in the way we are going forward to develop the north in these new mining regulations.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I'm actually really pleased that the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane raised the fact we have two very different bills incorporated together in Bill 39. It is clearly talking about two separate extractions, two separate industries, and the fact that we have lumped them together. Even when you look through the bill, it's actually separated into the Aggregate Resources Act amendments and the Mining Act amendments. So I do question the reasoning, the background. Perhaps the parliamentary assistant, in his two-minute reply, could educate us as to why these two acts were lumped together, because they are very different. They're treated very differently. The industries are treated very differently. What they do is very different, both in their abilities and their locations: northern Ontario and the rest of Ontario.

I will attempt, in my 20-minute speech, to raise some positives in Bill 39. I will take you up on your challenge, but of course opposition, by its very nature, is to highlight the issues that we see and try to encourage, through positive amendments, changes that we think can make the legislation better.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): One of the government members can reply. The member from Ajax-Pickering.

Mr. Joe Dickson: It's an honour and a pleasure to wrap up on Bill 39, a combination of both aggregates and the Mining Act. We have two ministries involved, of course: northern development and mines and MNR, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry.

I recall this week that the gentleman from the opposition from Nipissing—the gentleman always with a

very bright yellow tie on him. You can't miss him; he's front row. He and I, on many occasions during those short school bus rides all over the province when we were dealing with aggregates, brought back a lot of memories. But in the end, we were concurring, in common, and we were supportive of one another, that we wanted to make sure that all of this work that is coming forward today was under way.

I thank the opposition. They've been very supportive. I'd like to thank the members from Sarnia-Lambton, Timiskaming-Cochrane, Beaches-East York, Dufferin-Caledon and Ajax-Pickering for their comments. Who did I miss? You had your hand up. You wanted to leave the room? I'm only kidding, Laurie. I do that.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Before the government twists themselves into a pretzel in self-congratulations in bringing forward Bill 39, if I may, I would like to do a bit of history about how Bill 39 came about.

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I've spent a lot of time on the aggregate issue. I proactively made sure that I was a member of the Standing Committee on General Government. There were actually three iterations of that committee in the study of the ARA review. Looking at it now, it's quite interesting, because there were a number of members over the years who participated and were active in this, and yet they aren't here anymore, which speaks to how long we've been waiting for some kind of amendment to the Aggregate Resources Act. I see Donna Cansfield, I see Bas Balkissoon, I see Rick Bartolucci and I see Rosario Marchese. As I say, three different iterations of this committee were struck while we were studying the ARA, as we call it—the Aggregate Resources Act.

The one constant in our committee was a now-retired, hugely helpful and talented researcher by the name of Jerry Richmond. He was the constant, if I may, in the committee. Some members stayed through the whole thing because it was important to us. I think we've made reference to it—myself, Laurie Scott from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock and Mike Harris from Kitchener-Conestoga. There was some consistency, but it took an awfully long time for us to get there.

This all began because in 2011 there was a general election. And in 2011 we had a very substantial land-holding purchase that occurred in North Dufferin county. It was purchases of big acreages—500-acre; 1,000-acre farms—by the Highland Companies. Initially, people thought that they were purchasing potato farms, because that's what these operations were. They were family farms that had been growing for generations in North Dufferin. They started being bought up. By the time people started connecting the dots, there were almost 10,000 acres purchased in Dufferin county.

My Liberal opponent at the time in the 2011 election thought that this would be a good opportunity to make some hay with the candidate—me—and started sug-

gesting that there was some kind of untoward happening with me and this purchase of land. Well, we all know in Ontario that you have a willing buyer and you have a willing seller. That's what was happening.

What happened in that 2011 election was a suggestion that there should be a review of the Aggregate Resources Act. It was very important that the act get amended and updated because clearly it was not sufficiently protecting the people of Ontario.

What year is it now? It's 2016—five years, Speaker. What happened between that very impassioned 2011 discussion and debate and 2016? I do not pretend to understand, but please, please don't spend a lot of your debate time talking about, "How great is it that we brought this forward, and aren't we a fast government to act on this?" Because this is not fast by any measure.

Because we spent so much time in general government on the report on the Aggregate Resources Act, I'd like to cover off some of the issues that we discussed. Again, these committee reports can be very valuable resource documents. These come from a place where members from all three parties—Liberals, Tories, NDP—participated in this review.

We travelled. We travelled to Manitoulin Island because Manitoulin Island has the largest aggregate extraction in the province of Ontario. It's actually the only extraction that offloads onto ships. It's pretty interesting. They're not using our roads. They've been able to do it because of the location, because of where the extraction is occurring: straight onto docks. I think it was actually referenced yesterday in debate: It comes down to Lake Ontario.

We visited Manitoulin Island. We visited Dufferin county. I'm proud to say that it is the first and only time in the history of the Legislative Assembly that I can find that a committee actually came to my community. We had hearings in Dufferin county. Why? Because we were ground zero for why the ARA had to be updated. So we did that in Dufferin county.

We visited, Speaker, your part of the world because, again, there are many examples of rehabilitation and of operations occurring today that have been in place for years that are within the community. We saw what it was doing and how it was happening, and we learned how to make it better. Then, we made some recommendations. This document, the Report on the Review of the Aggregate Resources Act, is all about the history of why we did it and the recommendations.

It may interest the members of the assembly to know that the number one municipality in the province of Ontario for aggregate extraction is Ottawa. Not many people know that. They think of Ottawa as an urban centre, but what we learned and what we need to understand is that aggregate is where aggregate exists. We can't build aggregate plants where we want them to be. If the stone, sand and gravel are located there, that's where they're going to be extracted from. The difference is that we, as legislators, have a responsibility to make sure it's done properly and fairly, that people are compensated for

it and that it's done safely for the environment. We were trying to do that balance with this report, and I think, to be honest, we did a pretty good job of it.

We raised a lot of issues. I'd like to go over them, mostly because I see an opportunity here. When people say that the Aggregate Resources Act needs to be updated, I absolutely agree. Every piece of legislation that we bring forward in this chamber needs to be reviewed and discussed, and we need to pull back and say, is this appropriate in today's time? Is this what we need to do in 2016, when we passed this in 2006? Is it still valid in 2016? Are there things that have changed with our environment or with our communities that we missed in 2006 that we can update in 2016? That's what this report was supposed to do. So, if I may, let's talk about some of that.

Second recommendation: "The Ministry of Natural Resources should work and cooperate with individual aggregate-producing municipalities to add mapped information of aggregate operations and local planning designations...." Now, this one is near and dear to me, because I represent Dufferin county and the town of Caledon. The town of Caledon, in the mid-1990s, did what I think was a very proactive thing. They said, "We have aggregates in Caledon. We know we have aggregates in Caledon. Some are being extracted; some are still in the ground. Why don't we map it so that our residents know where it is and understand what it could mean? Why don't people get the right to understand and access where the aggregate exists in the town of Caledon?" And they did that.

Then they went one step further. They said, "We all understand that there are different levels of aggregate. There are different types. We've talked about limestone"—there are hundreds of them, so I'm not going to try to list them all. But what they said was, "Let's figure out where the deposits are and then let's decide, as a municipal government, if there is going to be extraction, which ones are we going to do first, second and third?" And they did that.

It was a very challenging exercise, but they had industry co-operating, they had municipal co-operation and they had residents participating. It was a good process, because what it ultimately meant is that, today, if you go and you want to buy a piece of property in the town of Caledon, you can go to the town of Caledon planning department and say, "I would like to see where the aggregate deposits are in the town of Caledon." Not where the aggregate operations are, because that's pretty easy information to get from the Ministry of Natural Resources. This is actually where the deposits exist. You can do that right now in Caledon.

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Part of the frustration that people had in north Dufferin was that the purchase of land and the acquiring of the land came at a time when people had no idea why it was happening, so it led to fear. It led to concerns. Ultimately, it led to a very strong movement that said, "We do not want this in our community, and we are going to figure out a way around it."

This recommendation that talks about mapping the information on where aggregate exists in municipalities is not in Bill 39—a real shame; it really is. The representatives of Caledon have proactively gone throughout Ontario, talking to other municipal levels of government, explaining to them what the value is of mapping their aggregates. Other people have taken that on as a project when they are doing their official plans. It was something that Caledon led proactively on. We were trying to highlight it and say, "Let's encourage that as a senior level of government so that other municipalities understand the value of it and people understand what to expect." We didn't see that in Bill 39, and I think that's a shame.

The other one that I wanted to reference is the fifth recommendation. "The Ministry of Natural Resources should undertake measures to simplify the provincial standards on aggregate and the aggregate resources policy manual. The committee supports the use of innovative measures by the ministry, such as the digital collection of inspection data...."

Again, this speaks to people wanting the ability to find the details, to get the information. And in 2016, really, we can't get it online? Isn't that a little silly? Speaker, people have to go to Milton. People have to go and physically attend an MNR regional office to look at what a licence says, to see if there are any outstanding issues, to find out the last time that it was assessed. We can't do that online? My heavens, we're trying to do it with our health records and we can't do it with aggregates in the province of Ontario? It boggles the mind that we haven't got to that stage. This was a recommendation from the all-party committee and we don't see it in Bill 39. So that's a shame.

There was a lot of discussion about fees—licensing fees, annual fees. Many, many municipalities have—well, first of all, I'll step back. There is a per-tonne fee, so for every tonne of aggregate that is extracted and removed from a site in the province of Ontario, with the exception of northern Ontario, the municipality and the province share a few cents. I think right now it's eight cents, but don't quote me—less than 10 cents, anyway. As I say, it's shared between the municipalities, the province of Ontario and TOARC, which is an organization that rehabilitates abandoned pits.

We have a very small per-tonne fee. Many, many presentations talked about the need for that fee to be increased. In the report, we said, "You don't have to wait to amend the ARA. It's actually not in the act, so go ahead, government. You can increase the fee." I actually had industry agreeing to it, if there was some assurance that the fee was going to be used and recirculated back into making sure that it was going to be part of approval facilitation within the industry.

Five years later, still waiting for that fee change. We don't need legislation for it. Yet, here we are, still talking about it and still waiting. I think that's a real shame.

"The increased revenues should be suitably distributed to support Ministry of Natural Resources aggregate pro-

gram administration and inspection....” In other words, if you’re going to charge us more, which we understand, then make sure it actually makes the process better. We made that recommendation. It’s not in Bill 39. If anything, it actually gets more convoluted and confusing in Bill 39, because if you read the section, they talk about the annual licence fee: “Every licensee shall pay any prescribed annual licence fee within the time period that is determined in accordance with the regulations.”

That actually means that there isn’t for sure going to be a fee because it says “any.” If I may, reading from the current ARA, Aggregate Resources Act, “Every licensee shall pay an annual licence fee in the prescribed amount within the prescribed time.”

So we’ve actually gone from “shall” in the current legislation, to “may” in the proposed legislation. I would suggest to you that is not clarity. That is not a good thing. If someone can explain, please justify why you’ve done that. I would love to hear the justification because I’m having a hard time with it. It doesn’t make sense to me.

I’m going to run out of time, which is unfortunate. But I want to talk about aggregate recycling, something pretty important to me. Every day I see, driving through Dufferin-Caledon, aggregate extraction. You could not come into my riding and not understand that there is extraction happening in my community. So one of the things that I did, and I presented it in the last Legislature, is a private member’s bill that would encourage or force more use of recycled aggregate. Why? Because if we use more recycled aggregate, we don’t have to keep finding more pits. We can actually use this product over and over and over. It does not degrade. It doesn’t change when you build a road or a bridge. If you have to repair it, all you do is crush it up again and start all over. It works.

And credit where credit is due: The Ministry of Transportation is doing a half-decent job. Some of our municipalities are not. And I say that because some of them, in their requests for proposals, actually specify that primary or virgin aggregate—fresh, new aggregate—is the only product that they will accept in their bids. Again, the science hasn’t caught up. The science is there that proves recycled aggregate works and is as safe and as strong as the new aggregate. And yet, we still need to do a better job on the recycling part. So I would like to see much more of that. Okay, I did promise I’d find one thing that was good, so I’m going to close with that.

In 4, it says, “Currently, the act requires a hearing if the minister changes the conditions of an aggregate licence or permit. The schedule provides for an exception to this requirement where the licence or permit is changed for the purpose of implementing a source protection plan under the Clean Water Act, 2006.”

That’s good; it’s a good amendment. It explains why the minister is getting new controls. It explains why the exception would be allowed. Unfortunately—here’s the unfortunate part—there are a number where the minister is actually given a lot of additional discretionary power, and discretionary power makes people nervous. Discretionary power means, “I’m going to treat you this way

and I’m going to treat you this way, and I have that right because I’m the minister.”

There is nothing that drives people crazier than to say, “I want to be treated fairly. I want to know what the rules are. I will follow the rules if I know them clearly.” This discretionary power that you’re giving the minister in many of the amendments that are being brought forward in Bill 39 raises a lot of concerns with me. I’ve talked often about how, when we have pieces of legislation that leave things to regulation, it leaves it to the unknown, and we have more of that in Bill 39 than I’m comfortable with.

I’m excited that we’re finally talking about the Aggregate Resource Act. I look forward to committee, but there’s a lot more that can be done.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate? No, questions and comments. My apologies. I recognize the member from Hamilton Mountain.

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Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and thank you for not putting me into further debate and forcing me to do 20 minutes on this bill, because it’s not something that I’m very familiar with. It’s something that’s completely out of my realm.

I want to start my two minutes by saying to the member from Dufferin-Caledon, well done in doing your homework and knowing the file. You spent time on the committee. You’ve done all of this work in the background, leading up to getting us to today.

But you raised several points that happen here all too often. When members are put together on committees, they come together from all parties. They work together so hard to raise issues. Speaker, you were on the Select Committee on Developmental Services—I believe you were there with us. At times, you were there. The work that we did on that committee, the 46 recommendations that sit on a shelf, this is exactly the same thing that has happened again with aggregate resources. Now we find ourselves with a bill that’s put together with mining. I’m also hearing that it doesn’t make sense that the two bills are put together.

We have a government that doesn’t want to push things through quickly enough and when they do bring it forward, they bring it forward in a snap decision and sometimes don’t allow for the proper wording and stuff that goes into these bills.

Leaving too much to a minister’s discretion, we all know, does not always work in the best interests of the public. That’s our job; that’s what we’re here to do: to make sure that we build legislation that works properly, so that the industries or whichever legislation we’re talking about that time—it works best for them.

Congratulations to the member on her debate.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bob Delaney: I would like to pass some comments on some of the remarks made by the member. She talked about the period between 2011 and 2014. I’m going to give her the benefit of the doubt and suggest that

the goodwill that she says she has toward getting this bill passed and its measures enacted is exactly as she has put it.

During that minority government of 2011 to 2014, some 70% of government legislation was either blocked or filibustered. It is important to remember that whatever it is that we call, in politics, “the ballot question” at election time is not likely to be about aggregate.

This bill will do exactly what the member has asked. In fact, it proposes a custom planning approach for unique applications, such as those in the bed of a lake or a river or a mega-quarry, which may require additional studies—something that she spoke about.

The province has also proposed to make changes that would require new applications to identify a cap on the amount of area that could be disturbed at one time—again, something that she has talked about.

Perhaps the best way to clarify these would be to go over to the ministry and ask the staff for the explanations that she has brought up in the House, which would certainly enable her to resolve many of the things that she has questioned here in this debate.

I will note, however, that both the city of Toronto and my city of Mississauga aggressively recycle aggregate.

She talked about what she referred to as discretionary power, but I would suggest that one size doesn't fit all. Although I don't think she is advocating that, I will again give her the benefit of the doubt in her remarks.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Mr. Ted Arnott: That's very kind of the member for Mississauga–Streetsville to give the member for Dufferin–Caledon the benefit of the doubt. She certainly deserves that. She has worked very hard on this issue for a long time. I thought that she gave an excellent speech this afternoon.

The speeches on Thursday afternoon after private members' bills are discussed debated and voted upon—sometimes this is one of the quieter hours that we have. But her speech was excellent, and it demonstrates her interest and, obviously, the sincere concern that she brings forward in this Legislature on every issue. But she has worked very hard on this.

I certainly want to express my interest as well, as the member for Wellington–Halton Hills, in this entire issue. In Wellington–Halton Hills, we have aggregate deposits, and it's an ongoing issue in our riding. The member for Mississauga–Streetsville said that if it's not “the ballot question”—he implied that it's not really that important. This is a very, very important issue in many ridings across the province, and we need to get it right.

As the member for Dufferin–Caledon said, we have to deal with the aggregate where it is, but we have to ensure that there's a fair process for adjacent residents and property owners so that their issues and concerns are listened to and, to whatever extent possible, resolved. We have to ensure that whatever we do in terms of aggregate extraction, there is a process which respects environ-

mental protection and that we're not doing damage to the environment over the long term.

The member referenced the Standing Committee on General Government and the Report on the Review of the Aggregate Resources Act, and I would commend that to all the members of the House who haven't read the report. It was an all-party committee. It came forward with a number of recommendations, several of which are not reflected in the bill that we're currently debating.

Especially, I would give the member for Dufferin–Caledon acknowledgement and credit for the passionate approach she has taken to encourage greater use of recycled aggregate. I would concur with her that to the extent that we can use more recycled aggregates, obviously that reduces the pressure on the existing pits and quarries and means we don't have to open as many.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Thank you to the member from Dufferin–Caledon for educating us on the history of this bill. I wasn't aware that in 2011 she had a candidate who questioned her involvement in the purchase of farmland in her riding, to the point where there was some kind of underhanded dealings—and her involvement in that. This issue really came about from a Liberal candidate. I hope this Liberal candidate—I don't know what their name is; she didn't mention it. It would be interesting if this Liberal candidate is lobbying this government on some of their issues that they had during the campaign.

The member from Dufferin–Caledon, I think, deserves to be commended on the job and the dedication that she took on this issue. Again, it's a good thing it was raised during a campaign. Obviously her interest is very sincere, and she has done a lot of homework on this bill and given us a lot of history.

The interesting part that we talk about, and many members have mentioned this, is the recycling component. We are so conscious of our earth and passing on a recycling program so we can be touted as stewards of the earth. We are the stewards of our land, of the air and of our environment. It only makes sense that encouraging recycling of aggregate is something that needs to be in this bill.

We have the carbon tax. We're trying to reduce emissions. We're trying to reduce our carbon footprint. This is a step that could help the environment.

I know that there are concerns about the recycling and the aggregate under this bill, and the blueprint document that was also commissioned through the committee. There are some great initiatives in there that I know are missing from this bill. If the government really wants to take this seriously, they need to pay attention in committee and listen to the member and the experience she comes with.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I return to the member from Dufferin–Caledon to wrap up.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I appreciated the feedback from the members—most of them. It speaks to the importance that

I think we all need to place on this issue. While there are certainly areas and municipalities in Ontario that have more aggregate than others, the reality is that it impacts all of us, whether it is through water or whether it is through vehicular traffic. We all need to be aware that this is a valuable resource that we have to manage and we have to ensure is dealt with appropriately.

I know, based on how the committee process works, that we can't insert new ideas when we take Bill 39 to committee, but I would hope that at the very least we can clean up some of the ambiguity that is currently in Bill 39 and clarify it for the industry, for the municipalities and for the landowners, so that they understand their rights and responsibilities, and so that can accurately be reflected in Bill 39.

What people need more than anything when we're dealing with aggregate extraction and their interconnection with the government is that they need to understand what their responsibilities are and what the rules are for all of the players. I don't think we see this in Bill 39, and I hope that, through the committee process and the amendments, that can be improved.

1720

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate? I recognize the member from Toronto—Danforth.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. I appreciate being recognized.

Before I go into the substance of the bill, I want to say that the member from Dufferin—Caledon did a very good job of going through the context within which all this is being debated. Obviously her riding was ground zero for the mega-quarry. In fact, it was the fight around the mega-quarry that I think precipitated this whole review of the Aggregate Resources Act. I can't say exactly what precipitated the review of the Mining Act, but the mega-quarry certainly was a noteworthy battle in the history of southern Ontario.

As the member commented, this battle went on for several years. I think it started around 2009. Strangely enough, I first heard about it because I started getting emails from my constituents, a number of whom had either country places near where the mega-quarry was going to be located or were participants in vacation camps that were located on rivers that had headwaters that would be affected by that mega-quarry.

People need to understand exactly the scale of the event that brought this issue to this chamber today. The mega-quarry would have covered several thousand acres of class 1 prime farmland, in a province where we've seen substantial loss of farmland over the decades—very substantial loss. It would have been twice as deep as Niagara Falls is high. It would have gone to 200 feet below the water table, and I'm assuming, if I'm remembering correctly, it would have required pumps to be in place in perpetuity to deal with the accumulation of water in the bottom of that mega-quarry. It was located in a spot that influenced the headwaters of five separate river systems.

All of us in the chamber were totally taken aback that a project of this size, with this impact, could be going

forward with effectively the Legislature and the province of Ontario standing to the side. It took incredible pressure—many rallies out front of this building, rallies in different parts of Toronto, rallies in different parts of southwestern Ontario—for an environmental assessment process to be required. It took years of political mobilizing and organization for that project to be defeated. In fact, it wasn't until 2013, a full four years later, that the book was closed on the mega-quarry.

Certainly, all of us across Ontario owe a huge debt to the people of Dufferin—Caledon and Melancthon for their mobilizing, the work they did to protect that land, to protect our water, to protect our future, and to set in motion a process to revise the Aggregate Resources Act so that we wouldn't face such issues in the future; or that if we do face them, there are adequate levers to address mistakes or problems that arise. Because, frankly, no one can defend a project of that nature on prime farmland, disrupting our water resources at the scale that this would have had an impact.

Speaker, I will go into some greater detail, but I want to say right now that, unfortunately, this bill doesn't go into a lot of detail. Much of what's needed to actually protect our land, our water, our resources is left to regulation. What we have is a sketch of a framework that a government could use to act, or not act, on the whole issue of aggregate extraction, and that is profoundly worrisome.

I don't know what the government's thinking is on this entirely. They may assume that they will be good stewards. Given the length of the fight to protect the land in Melancthon and the difficulty in stopping the mega-quarry, I'm not sure I would call them good stewards, but they may have that impression. The reality is that no government is immortal. Governments come and governments go. Others may have the full range of authority that's in this bill to act within a legislative framework that's so broad, so vague that regulations will allow a government to do virtually anything.

That is a cautionary tale. This bill as written does not, I believe, put us in a position where we could stop a mega-quarry in the future, without the people of this province mobilizing themselves and engaging in political combat for an extended period in a determined way. Speaker, I don't think that makes sense. I don't think that's right.

This province has a huge food-processing sector. We're in a world where food is going to become more scarce in the future. As the world heats up, as there is less water, there will be less food. Guaranteeing our food security is going to become a far higher priority. A bill that does not, in a detailed way, attend to that question of food security is a bill that is flawed. This bill may be useful, but it is flawed.

This government five years ago, in 2011, promised changes because that whole experience of the fight over the mega-quarry shaped the political culture in this province. It was important for the government at the time to say it was going to address the Aggregate Resources

Act. No one wanted to see this issue of a mega-quarry reassert itself at its initial location or in another part of Ontario.

This bill will update the Aggregate Resources Act, and it is claimed it will provide for stronger oversight and environmental accountability, improved information and participation, and increased and equalized fees and royalties. One of my colleagues—I think it was Mr. Vanthof from Timiskaming—Cochrane—noted that it's an odd bill because there are two entirely different acts located within it. The Aggregate Resources Act and the Mining Act have very little crossover—very, very little crossover—but they are bundled together, unlikely siblings in one bill.

The Mining Act is being amended consistent with the government's mining modernization strategy. It's identical to the previous bill, Bill 155, the Mining Amendment Act, 2015. What we're told is that the majority of the amendments are meant to streamline the antiquated claims process in the province. From comments by my colleague from Algoma Manitoulin, there is some streamlining going on.

What will this bill do? I'll speak to the aggregate piece. The Aggregate Resources Act—that's schedule 1—allows the minister to set aside areas of crown-owned aggregate or topsoil where no permit will be issued or where it will otherwise be reserved. This would allow the minister to protect natural heritage, but there's no clear obligation to do so or to consider doing so.

So it's a provision that allows the government to be on the side of the angels but does not require it to be on the side of the angels. In my mind, that's a flaw. It's clear there are some very magnificent pieces of real estate in this province, gorgeous areas that should be protected. It makes sense to me that the minister in fact should be doing a survey, looking for those areas and making it clear so that people are not in a position of being surprised when a development goes along. Frankly, to be fair to the entrepreneurs who may be interested in developing an aggregate extraction site, they should know where they would be told, "Forget it," right off the top.

The minister may now add a condition or rescind or vary an existing condition on an existing licence or permit at any time. The minister may order more impact studies from existing quarry operators and enhance site impact studies with respect to new applications and add conditions with respect to source protection plans under the Clean Water Act, and enable requirements for peer review of technical studies.

I don't think those are bad powers for a minister to have. I think it would probably be a good idea to have a clearer definition of where they can be exercised, but frankly, again—and I use the mega-quarry as my standard, my North Star for determining orientation—these powers may well have been useful at that time.

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It requires The Ontario Aggregate Resources Corp.—TOARC—to comply with proscribed performance and reporting requirements and allows the government to

remove TOARC as the designated trustee of the Aggregate Resources Trust.

It allows for greater control of truck haulage and standardized measurements, but there are no details specified. Again, this addresses the concern that I had earlier: that we're given a sketch of a framework, with so many pieces left unaddressed. For all of us here who have to make a decision and assessment of the act, who have to vote and be held accountable for that vote in the future, this is a blank cheque.

The minister must consider whether adequate consultation with indigenous communities has taken place on an aggregate extraction. I would say, on the face of it, that that's a good idea. This should be recognized in law. The minister should have the power to determine that, so that the minister can be held accountable if in fact the minister has failed to do their job properly.

It increases the authority to make regulations with respect to record-keeping as well as site rehabilitation reports. Clearly, if you're going to understand what is going on at a site, you need records that are reliable, you need regulations that will dictate how those records are collected in the first place and maintained, and you need good documentation on site rehabilitation.

It streamlines processes for non-commercial and low-risk activities and allows "flexibility" to waive some application requirements. I'm a bit more concerned about that piece.

I want to talk about some of the weaknesses in this act. Again, I'll be talking to the Aggregate Resources Act, schedule 1 of the bill before us. This is almost entirely enabling legislation, with few details—almost entirely enabling legislation.

We went through a process. There was a consultation and there was a committee set up to look at the aggregate resource extraction issue. They put out a document called A Blueprint for Change. That document, which is usually a jump-off point, not an end point, had more details in it than this bill does. That doesn't seem like a good approach to me. In fact, A Blueprint for Change should have had an outline of what had to be done, with this bill getting down into the details of what must be done. Again, many, many changes are left to regulation.

The blueprint proposals, like agricultural impact studies and maximum disturbed area provisions, are not described in the bill. If you're going to have agricultural impact studies, if you're going to set out a requirement to define maximum disturbed area, it would make an awful lot of sense to have details of that in the bill.

The bill offers no clear solution for stakeholders who had been concerned about the impact of the Melancthon mega-quarry on prime farmland and water, which, in my opinion, prompted the aggregate review process back in 2011. Would this bill prevent future conflicts, like that around the mega-quarry? Apparently not. That, Speaker, is a flaw in this bill; it is a weakness, one that I hope that government will address when we go through committee.

Again, we have these big conflicts here in Ontario, conflicts that all parties get drawn into and that affect constituents, people on the ground and businesses. The

hope is that we learn from them and that we bring forward legislation to prevent those sorts of conflicts and problems in the future. Apparently, this act—although it was sparked by that conflict—doesn't give us the tools necessary to avoid it in the future.

The bill offers no clear solution to those seeking greater restrictions on large quarry operations in sensitive areas like the Niagara Escarpment. It talks about rehabilitation. Rehabilitation is not a bad thing, but frankly, Speaker, when you're talking about prime farmland, it can be awfully difficult to rehabilitate after resource extraction, after aggregate extraction. I would think that our goal would be preservation of that prime farmland in the first place, to absolutely make sure that we don't have to through the conflicts and the battles and then hope that someone has figured out how to rehabilitate the land after the pit is exhausted and we have this scar on the landscape.

The bill does not require a needs assessment to help balance interests when land use decisions are being made about quarry applications. That strikes me as an error, a flaw, Speaker.

The bill is silent on maximizing use of recycled aggregates, such as allowing as-of-right deposits of recycled materials at quarry sites, subject to quality standards. However, there is a provision to enable record-keeping and tracking of recycled aggregates. If we're going to protect the headwaters of our rivers, if we're going to protect our forests and our farmlands, we need to use recycled aggregates. When we break up old foundations, when we break up old roads, when we have many, many tonnes of concrete and gravel that could be recycled for use in the future, the idea of not using them, of burying them somewhere and at the same time digging up some other place that has been previously untouched, makes no sense at all. It's not to the advantage of Ontario. It's not to our benefit. So this is a major flaw in this bill. It should be prescribing more recycling of aggregates. It should be facilitating recycling of aggregates. If you want to protect the natural world, you need to be recycling this material.

The bill offers no clear solution for those seeking remedies for excessive noise, truck traffic or other impacts of aggregate operations. Speaker, if you haven't dealt with people who are involved in a study over aggregates before, you will, in future, if you deal with them, get a sense of their total frustration over their relatively quiet area being turned into an incredibly noisy industrial location. The frustration, resentment and anger they feel is extraordinary. This bill should be addressing that shortfall, and it doesn't.

The bill offers no clear solution to growing communities that are suddenly surprised by the reappearance of long-dormant quarry permits near to what has become a residential area since the permit was originally approved, perhaps decades earlier. That makes no sense. The government should be clear, in dealing with these quarries, that an area around the quarry is not available for residential development, which protects purchasers

who may buy something that they will later regret; it protects quarry operators, who, if they have been operating for a long time and let their quarry go dormant for a decade or two decades, decide to start up and suddenly find themselves in full-scale warfare with their neighbours—no favour to them. The bill should be saying either that there needs to be an area around the quarry in which residential development will not be allowed or that if residential development is allowed up to the quarry, the quarry then becomes permanently dormant. It simply sets the ground for a conflict that will play out much later. It makes no sense.

One of the big issues with the Melancthon mega-quarry was that an environmental assessment was not required. Political pressure—a lot of it—pushed Dalton McGuinty to mandate one for the mega-quarry. This bill enables regulations to require new site impact studies, sort of like a quasi-environmental assessment. But this is not an environmental assessment, and the approval authority is the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, not the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change. That is a substantial flaw. When you have an impact on the scale that the mega-quarry presented, you need an environmental assessment. Something less is not adequate.

Speaker, thank you for the time. I look forward to comments from my colleagues.

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The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Mr. Joe Dickson: It's a pleasure to stand again on this bill. I acknowledge the member from Toronto—Danforth and some of the comments he's made. I don't want to have any scaremongering, so we best put to rest a couple of items that were mentioned. It has to do, of course, with protecting agricultural resources.

It's important to know a number of changes for the next phase: regulations and standards of ARA policy development. They include:

- introducing new requirements for studies and information on agricultural resources—fairly significant;
- streamlining application requirements for small, temporary extractive operations on a farm where the agricultural condition may be maintained or improved;
- enhancing the rehabilitation information requirements for the new sites; and
- improvements to rehabilitation reporting requirements.

All of that leads to the obvious conclusion that these changes, which will be subject to further stakeholder, indigenous community and public consultation, will improve how agricultural resources are addressed and understood related to agricultural proposals.

I mentioned in a committee meeting this week that I was making phone calls to a couple of ministers, trying to resolve a few issues. It was ironic because—and this has really occurred over the last few weeks, when the weather was a little warmer—I contacted the Minister of Agriculture—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. Robert Bailey: Joe's out of time.

It's a pleasure to rise and comment on the member from Toronto-Danforth. He spoke about when you're trying to bring in a new pit or quarry and the conflict with residents. I certainly understand that because we've seen some of that in my area as well. I know the member from Dufferin-Caledon spoke about that as well. That was something that they covered as they toured the province with the committee when they were looking at this bill in the first place and some of the suggestions they made.

Quarries are important to Ontario. As we said, with the infrastructure investments that are going to be made, they will be important. The recycling of concrete and asphalt—I certainly applaud that and support that as well. That's an industry that's really growing. Like I said, I go back a long ways in that industry. That wouldn't have been looked at 50 years ago. With the technology and the ability to do that, it only makes sense to recycle those products, because they were mined in the first place and a lot of work and expense went into taking them out of the ground and they should be reused where they can be.

One thing about modernizing the Mining Act that I was reading about in the bill as I looked at it was changing how they stake mining claims. One of the concerns, apparently, that the industry has expressed is that they've had a system that's worked in Ontario for over 100 years and they're concerned that by going to some modern electronic system—if you look at the success that the government's had either with eHealth, SAMS and a number of other things that they've done, the industry's concerned that this could happen to them. They're more comfortable with the staking system they've used. Now, if the government and the committee can prove that they can go to a new system that can work, I would be willing to support it, but I think we should look to the industry that deals with that every day.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Thank you to the member for Toronto-Danforth for adding his perspective on this bill. He talked about farmland and the need to protect farmland. That is extremely important because in the city of London, the London Plan talks about how we have to build up. Urban sprawl is no longer the way to build a city. Building out isn't always the best way to do it, and when we build out, that also takes away from farmland.

It actually got me thinking about the small towns around London. There is St. Marys, just outside of London. It was called the "stone town." It was a wonderful town. They had great jobs there because there were factories manufacturing stone, so people had really good jobs.

Also, in St. Marys, there is an actual quarry. I never knew that until, a few years ago, someone had suggested going out to the quarry. An interesting part about this quarry is it has water. It's a huge diving pool, if you will. There are fish in there and it's fresh water. I talked to the member from Dufferin-Caledon about that just now.

That's one of the things that you can do with a quarry, but she mentioned—it's a very valid point—that we don't want these massive ponds in every northern city or rural town.

That's where the aggregate piece for recycling comes in. If we can do more of that, we can eliminate, or at least minimize or balance out, how much we have to cultivate for new aggregate causing these massive quarries.

I'm really finding today's bill is a very educational piece, because a lot of us who come from cities don't have those quarries and aggregate issues—also, of course, the Mining Act piece—in our neighbourhoods, in our backyards. But we all need to understand the challenges around us.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Hon. Chris Ballard: It's wonderful to be able to speak for just two minutes.

Bill 39, the Aggregate Resources and Mining Modernization Act, is really quite important. I often think that we don't realize how sand and gravel impact our lives on a day-to-day basis, but if we drive on a road, if we walk on concrete, if we work in a building with concrete, we are impacted. I know sometimes, perhaps in more urban settings, that we are forgetful that the growth of those facilities is really because of the fact that sand and gravel were dug out of the ground somewhere, were crushed and were shipped to those locations.

From my reading of Bill 39, I am satisfied that this goes a long way. It strengthens the oversight and public input, especially around aggregate resources. I know, as someone who comes from a small town and rural setting where a large quarry opened and operated to the south of our community, how it impacted on our town in terms of roads—road widenings, big trucks growling through town at all hours. It really, quite frankly, made life hell for so many people.

I believe that our government is now taking a balanced approach to managing our province's aggregate resources. We recognize the need for growth and jobs and we also balance that with the responsibility to protect vital resources, prime farmland and groundwater. Bill 39, I believe, goes a long way to satisfying that balance.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I will return back to the member from Toronto-Danforth to wrap up.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I want to thank the members who addressed my comments: the member from Ajax-Pickering, the member from Sarnia-Lambton, the member from London-Fanshawe and the Minister of Housing. I appreciate your comments.

I have to say that I am very pleased that the member from Sarnia-Lambton addressed the whole question of aggregate recycling. Yes, there is a huge opportunity here, a tremendous opportunity both for job creation and for protection of the environment.

The member from Ajax-Pickering and the Minister of Housing, I don't have quite the same faith in this bill that you have. I wish the bill was more detailed so we had a better sense of what we were doing rather than simply

enabling a government to do very much what it would like to do. Again, I think you probably have great confidence in your ability to act in a way that you see as thoughtful and judicious, but you shouldn't assume that because you give someone a blank cheque, they will always have that blank cheque in their hands. It may pass to someone else in whom you have less confidence.

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Speaker, this bill is not as strong as those of us who went through the mega-quarry fight would have liked. There may be some useful things in it. That, I think, will be explored further in other debate and likely in committee. But, for now, I would say that would not have prevented the mega-quarry fight from happening. That, to me, speaks to a fundamental weakness in it, because if it would not have dealt with that issue at the beginning and if it would not have allowed it to be resolved quickly, then it hasn't addressed the issue that really spurred this debate, spurred this legislation in the first place.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Han Dong: I'm very pleased to join my honourable colleagues to debate this important bill. Just look around. In my riding, I see all of the tremendous growth in the last little while, and it will all be impacted or affected to some degree by aggregates and mining around the province.

Last year, I had the pleasure of attending the annual convention of PDAC, the Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada, in my riding, where I met with a lot of professionals and experts in this field. It was amazing to see how many jobs the mining sector is creating. Many, many constituents in my riding will, in my mind, possibly be indirectly affected by this bill moving forward.

Actually, I want to speak to schedule 2 of the bill, related to Mining Act modernization. We've been involved in and looking forward to continuing our efforts to modernize the Mining Act for some time now. Bill 39 is the continuation of work that began a decade ago, when Ontario introduced its first-ever mineral development strategy. From a participatory standpoint, our work today builds on the broader consultative efforts that led to the development of our original mineral development strategy in 2006.

Similar efforts helped to draft our refreshed strategy in 2015. It continues the work that went into Bill 173, the Mining Amendment Act, in 2009, which introduced the majority of amendments required for the first two phases of the Mining Act modernization process.

Through Bill 173, the Mining Act was refined to encourage prospecting, staking and exploration for the development of mineral resources in a manner consistent with the recognition and affirmation of existing aboriginal and treaty rights in section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982, including the duty to consult. It was also refined to minimize the impact of these activities on public health, safety and the environment, which is very, very important, as you know, Speaker. I did want to draw attention to

this point for the benefit of my colleague from Algoma-Manitoulin, who in the debate yesterday expressed concern that aboriginal consultation requirements were not included in Bill 39. Aboriginal consultation—

Hon. Chris Ballard: They were.

Mr. Han Dong: You're very correct, my honourable member from Newmarket-Aurora. Aboriginal consultation has been mandated and applied for some years now. We have developed or continued to build excellent relationships with many of our First Nations partners.

Further, Speaker, the legislative requirement around meeting our duty to consult on all aspects of the exploration, development and mining process was included in Bill 173, and is actually now a part of our comprehensive operational process as it relates to the entire mining cycle. I think the member across will be happy to hear that his concern is actually answered not only in our operational process, but will be addressed further as we go on with this bill.

If there is one point I would like to emphasize in my remarks today, it is that our work on these files continues to be the product of extensive consultation and engagement with aboriginal communities, in addition to our many partners: exploration and mining companies, prospectors, prospecting and mining associations, northern communities, as well as other groups of individuals in the orbit of mineral development in Ontario that have a stake in the sound management of Ontario's mining lands.

Bill 39 deals specifically with phase III of our Mining Act modernization project. The third phase of our Mining Act modernization process has two main components: first, moving from ground staking and paper map staking of mining claims to province-wide online registration of mining claims; and second, creating an online mining land administration system that would enhance client access to Ontario's mining lands data and improve their ability to manage their files online.

It is 2016, and I think it's very appropriate that we are taking these steps not only to modernize the mining registration process, but as well to recognize that the technology is available to us and to the industry, and we have the responsibility of making it as efficient as possible. These changes, if passed, will transform the way mining lands are administered in Ontario.

Making such dramatic and fundamental changes to the way things have been done for more than a hundred years is a complex undertaking, one that has required thoughtful and thorough consultation with all impacted groups.

We are fully aware of and are sensitive to the impact that moving to electronic claim registration could have on the traditional role of Ontario prospectors. Speaker, notwithstanding the new opportunities that we expect will arise for prospectors to provide new or different services to the exploration community, we're working directly with the Ontario Prospectors Association to ensure that the concerns of prospectors are heard and mitigated, where possible.

Having said that, it is clear that most prospectors understand Ontario's position with respect to the modernizing process and are amenable to moving forward with

these exciting and groundbreaking amendments to the Mining Act.

Among the consultation efforts that we have undertaken over the past few years, allow me to highlight:

- postings on the environmental and regulatory registries, inviting comments from all Ontarians;

- six regional workshops with Ontario's top 60 mining claim holders;

- more than 30 regional sessions with First Nation and Métis groups since 2014;

- more than 30 sessions with regional groups of the Ontario Prospectors Association across Ontario since 2014;

- more than 320 one-on-one sessions with individuals and companies to demonstrate how conversion would impact their mining claim holdings;

- more than 300 direct client information sessions related to Mining Act modernization; and

- regular meetings with the OPA, the Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada and the Ontario Mining Association.

I am proud that the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines continues to consult extensively with its client

groups and associations, including the Mining Act advisory committee, which includes representation from the mining industry, the mineral exploration sector, aboriginal groups as well as environmental and tourism groups.

We also established a land management advisory forum made up of active representation from the mineral exploration and development sector to review technical and administrative processes, timelines we proposed under phase III, and to provide advice to the ministry on the impact to the industry and suggest improvements that could be made.

It's quite important to stress the fact that as a result of this ongoing—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Thank you.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Seeing as it is 6 o'clock, before I adjourn the House, I want to thank all the pages for their contributions to the Legislature, and I want to wish everybody a great constituency week.

We will be adjourning the House until Monday, November 14, at 10:30 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1759.

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Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Moridi, Hon. / L'hon. Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	Minister of Research, Innovation and Science / Ministre de la Recherche, de l'Innovation et des Sciences

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Munro, Julia (PC)	York–Simcoe	
Murray, Hon. / L'hon. Glen R. (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Minister of the Environment and Climate Change / Ministre de l'Environnement et de l'Action en matière de changement climatique
Naidoo-Harris, Hon. / L'hon. Indira (LIB)	Halton	Associate Minister of Education (Early Years and Child Care) / Ministre associée de l'Éducation (Petite enfance et Garde d'enfants)
Naqvi, Hon. / L'hon. Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	Attorney General / Procureur général Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Natyshak, Taras (NDP)	Essex	
Nicholls, Rick (PC)	Chatham-Kent–Essex	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Oraziotti, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Sault Ste. Marie	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth–Wellington	
Potts, Arthur (LIB)	Beaches–East York	
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Rinaldi, Lou (LIB)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
Sandals, Hon. / L'hon. Liz (LIB)	Guelph	President of the Treasury Board / Présidente du Conseil du Trésor
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Sergio, Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	
Singh, Jagmeet (NDP)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	Deputy Leader, Recognized Party / Chef adjoint de parti reconnu
Smith, Todd (PC)	Prince Edward–Hastings	
Sousa, Hon. / L'hon. Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto–Danforth	
Takhar, Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thibeault, Hon. / L'hon. Glenn (LIB)	Sudbury	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Thompson, Lisa M. (PC)	Huron–Bruce	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Vernile, Daiene (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
Walker, Bill (PC)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Wong, Soo (LIB)	Scarborough–Agincourt	Deputy Speaker / Vice-présidente
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Première ministre Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	
Yurek, Jeff (PC)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	
Zimmer, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Willowdale	Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation / Ministre des Relations avec les Autochtones et de la Réconciliation
Vacant	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara-Ouest–Glanbrook	
Vacant	Ottawa–Vanier	

**STANDING COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉS PERMANENTS DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Standing Committee on Estimates / Comité permanent des budgets des dépenses

Chair / Présidente: Cheri DiNovo
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Monique Taylor
Bob Delaney, Cheri DiNovo
Joe Dickson, Han Dong
Michael Harris, Sophie Kiwala
Arthur Potts, Todd Smith
Monique Taylor
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Eric Rennie

**Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs /
Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques**

Chair / Président: Peter Z. Milczyn
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Ann Hoggarth
Yvan Baker, Toby Barrett
Han Dong, Victor Fedeli
Catherine Fife, Ann Hoggarth
Cristina Martins, Peter Z. Milczyn
Lou Rinaldi
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Eric Rennie

**Standing Committee on General Government / Comité
permanent des affaires gouvernementales**

Chair / Président: Grant Crack
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Lou Rinaldi
Yvan Baker, Mike Colle
Grant Crack, Lisa Gretzky
Ann Hoggarth, Harinder Malhi
Jim McDonell, Lou Rinaldi
Lisa M. Thompson
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przewdziecki

**Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité
permanent des organismes gouvernementaux**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Daiene Vernile
James J. Bradley, Raymond Sung Joon Cho
Wayne Gates, Monte Kwinter
Amrit Mangat, Cristina Martins
Randy Pettapiece, Shafiq Qaadri
Daiene Vernile
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przewdziecki

**Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de
la justice**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Lorenzo Berardinetti
Lorenzo Berardinetti, Mike Colle
Bob Delaney, Randy Hillier
Michael Mantha, Arthur Potts
Shafiq Qaadri, Laurie Scott
Daiene Vernile
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**Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité
permanent de l'Assemblée législative**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Steve Clark
Granville Anderson, Robert Bailey
James J. Bradley, Steve Clark
Vic Dhillon, Sophie Kiwala
Michael Mantha, Monte McNaughton
Soo Wong
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

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des comptes publics**

Chair / Président: Ernie Hardeman
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lisa MacLeod
John Fraser, Ernie Hardeman
Percy Hatfield, Monte Kwinter
Lisa MacLeod, Harinder Malhi
Peter Z. Milczyn, Julia Munro
Arthur Potts
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioic Lim

**Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité
permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

Chair / Président: Ted McMeekin
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Joe Dickson
Lorenzo Berardinetti, Grant Crack
Joe Dickson, Jennifer K. French
Ted McMeekin, Mario Sergio
Bill Walker, Soo Wong
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Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

**Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de
la politique sociale**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jagmeet Singh
Granville Anderson, Lorne Coe
Vic Dhillon, John Fraser
Amrit Mangat, Gila Martow
Ted McMeekin, Jagmeet Singh
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch